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FAMILY LECTURES:

OR,

A COPIOUS COLLECTION

OF

S E R M O N S,

Selected from the most CELEBRATED DIVINES,

On FAITH and PRACTICE.

ATTERBURY.	CLARKE.	JORTIN.	STEPHENS.
ADAMS.	CALAMY.	KENNET.	SNAPE.
ALLEN.	CONEY.	LITTLETON.	STILLINGFLEET.
BARROW.	DELANY.	LUCAS.	SEED.
BALGUY.	DUKE.	LUPTON.	SECKER.
BATTY.	GIBSON.	MOOR.	TILLOTSON.
BEVERIDGE.	HORT.	MOSS.	TILLY.
BENTLEY.	HOADLEY.	ORR.	TERRY.
BELLAMY.	HOPKINS.	PORTEUS.	TRAPP.
BLACKALL.	HICKMAN.	RIDLEY.	WAKE.
BROWN.	HORNE.	SHARPE.	WILSON.
BULL.	HOLE.	SHERLOCK.	WEBSTER.
BUNDY.	HARVEST.	SWIFT.	
BURNET.	IBBOT.	STEBBING.	

A NEW VOLUME.

Men giving Counsel by their Understanding, and declaring Prophecies; Leaders of the People by their Counsels, and by their Knowledge of Learning MEET FOR THE PEOPLE; wise and eloquent in their Instructions; honoured in their Generations, and the Glory of their Times. The People will tell of their Wisdom, and the Congregation will shew forth their Praise. ECCLESIASTICUS, xliii. 3, 4, 7, &c.

L O N D O N:

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1795.

FAMILY RECORDS

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P. A. R. B. E. F. S. C. O. A. S. C. I. O. K.

2 E R M O N 2

OF ESTHIMAN BRACED



P R E F A C E.

WHENEVER the belligerent powers of the world deem it just and necessary to encounter a formidable foe, they fail not to call forth their veteran troops, and to place themselves under the guidance of generals who have seen actual service. In this instance, though certainly not in all others, the Church Militant may imitate the worldly wisdom of a state. Against the enemies of the faith, who at the same moment are undermining the citadel by stratagem, and attacking it with open violence, it seems expedient to summon into the field those old and able defenders of it, who have *fought a good fight*, who have *kept the faith*, and who are now crowned with glory. In such a conjuncture, the BARROWS, the TILLOTSONS, the CLARKES, the BENTLEYS, the BULLS, and the SECKERS, are to be called from their honorable retreats, once more to buckle on the shield, and bring forth polished weapons from their well-stored armoury. Happily they still live among us, in their most energetic part, and their olive-wreathed spears are still strong, pointed, and fit for use. The illustrious champions are here embattled in a firm phalanx: and I believe no times, since the first establishment of Christianity, ever stood in greater need of their prowess.

Incited by zeal in a cause, which appeared to me to involve the welfare of nations, because it involves the happiness of human beings, who compose nations, I formed the design of collecting the scattered labours of the most eminent Divines who, in the days of our fathers, contended from the pulpit, with singular success and honour, against irreligion, and its consequence, immorality. I observed, for it was obvious to observe, and I had been solemnly informed by the first authority in the English church, that infidelity is increasing at this moment with a rapidity hitherto unexampled. I saw a great and mighty nation, illuminated by science, and occupying a vast space in the most polished part of Europe, publicly renouncing the Christian religion. The question was not, as formerly, concerning a few

A 2 speculative

speculative points, or disputable articles. The whole system of Christianity was at stake. All the professors of it were virtually accused of folly or imposture. I thought it at least as reasonable to be *alarmed* for the contagion of religious as of political error. In this hour of danger, I was unwilling to rely on myself, or any single arm for protection. I determined to bring forward the more popular works of those excellent divines, whose merit is allowed without controversy, who are acknowledged to have contended earnestly and effectually for the faith, and to place them, tried as they have been and approved, in the front of the battle.

I can see no reason to suppose that they may not be as successful defenders of faith and teachers of morality at this day as they were formerly. Truth is one and immutable. If what they eloquently advanced in the ears of our fathers was convincing, there is no cause to fear that it will not be equally so, if it can find equal attention, at the present hour. That they deserve, and will reward attention, there can be no doubt in the minds of those who are duly acquainted with their talents, their learning, and the efficacy of their ministry. Their contemporaries applauded them loudly and generally, and time has already sealed the decided approbation.

To name, in this place, a few only, as specimens of those assembled in this book, let me be permitted to ask, what *recent* writer argues against ATHEISM more cogently than BENTLEY? A man whose critical acumen was unparalleled; whose mental powers were athletic; who stood like a Colossus among the pigmy wittlings of his age, and who was therefore aspersed by their petty passions. This great man begins the collection with an attack on atheistical principles; which must be acknowledged no less seasonable than it is forcible.

Where among the philosophers of the day is to be found a man of more vigorous intellect, more profound, various, well-digested learning, than Dr. SAMUEL CLARKE, who furnishes the *second* Sermon? If he had applied to the heart as forcibly as he has addressed the understanding, he would have been a consummate preacher. His knowledge of the scriptures, and his luminous explanations of them, are masterly. The rampart of reason which he has erected round Christianity is, I think, impregnable.

With sincere complacency, I proceed to speak of the author of the third Sermon, a LIVING BISHOP, whose judicious zeal, seconded by an eloquence

eloquence peculiarly persuasive, render him in these times of danger not only an ornament but a bulwark * of religion. As a Preacher, his excellence is acknowledged by those who are the best judges, the PEOPLE ; and if I were desired by a foreigner to point out a model of beautiful pulpit eloquence in the English language, I should not hesitate to present a Sermon of Bishop PORTEUS, inserted in a subsequent part of the volume, ON THE LOVE OF PLEASURE.

And now I have taken the liberty of mentioning the name of Bishop PORTEUS, I hope he will pardon me for taking the further liberty of quoting the following passage from his last charge, which, I think, will prove that such a Collection as mine must, at this time, be highly desirable. Feeling my own imbecility, I am happy to be supported by authority ; especially by the high authority of a dignified divine, whom I have every reason to believe is as sincere as he is able. The alarming truth and importance of the quotation will apologize for its length.

“ Though,” says the Bishop to his clergy, “ there is no ground for
 “ apprehending the introduction of ATHEISM amongst us, yet we must
 “ not think ourselves secure from the inroad of every species of infidelity.
 “ It is not to be supposed that the public rejection of Christianity, by the
 “ governing part at least of a country so near our own, can possibly take
 “ place without *some* risque to ourselves, without *some* danger that
 “ our own people may catch the contagion of infidelity from their
 “ neighbours. For when we hear them (as we did repeatedly under their
 “ first rulers) representing our religion as gross and palpable imposture ;
 “ loading it with the most opprobrious appellations ; treating it with
 “ every possible mark of ignominy and insult ; and holding up its divine
 “ Author, his laws, his ordinances, his institutions, his ministers, and his
 “ altars, to universal abhorrence and contempt ; when we know that their
 “ bitter invectives against revelation have been circulated in the pub-
 “ lications of the day, through every town and every village in this island ;
 “ can we suppose it possible that all this should have made no unfavourable
 “ impressions on the minds of the people, especially of the illiterate, the
 “ ignorant, and the uninformed ; that it should not have corrupted the
 “ religious principles of some who were before untainted ; that it should
 “ not have confirmed the infidelity of others who were wavering and
 “ irresolute ; and that it should not have lessened in still more that respect,
 “ that reverence, that veneration for their Maker, their Redeemer, their

* Præsidium et decus.

“ religion, and every thing connected with it, which they had before been
 “ accustomed to entertain?”

“ For those reasons it will be highly necessary for every one intrusted with
 “ the care of a parish, to guard his people with the utmost care against these
 “ dangers; to pay a more than ordinary degree of attention to their in-
 “ struction in the great fundamental truths of religion both natural and
 “ revealed, more especially the doctrines of a moral Governor of the
 “ world, of a Providence, a Redeemer, a resurrection, a future state, and
 “ a future distribution of rewards and punishments; and to repel, with
 “ rigour and with effect, all those charges of fraud, falsehood, and
 “ fanaticism, which have been so liberally thrown on our religion.

“ We must, my reverend brethren, at this perilous crisis, contend with
 “ peculiar earnestness for the faith once delivered to the saints, and show
 “ that Christianity is not, as our enemies affirm, a cunningly devised
 “ fable, but *a real revelation from Heaven*, supported by such a body of
 “ evidence as it is impossible for any unprejudiced mind to resist; by a
 “ long train of prophecies; by the most astonishing and best attested
 “ miracles; by strong internal marks of truth; by the purity of its pre-
 “ cepts, the sublimity of its doctrines, the perfect and unspotted character
 “ of its divine Author; by an innumerable company of confessors, saints,
 “ and martyrs, who have sealed their testimony to it with their blood;
 “ and by the *visible good effects* it has produced in promoting the welfare,
 “ comfort, and happiness of mankind.

“ All these evidences, it is well known, with many other important col-
 “ lateral proofs of the truth of our religion, have, at various times, been
 “ stated to the world with great ability and great force of argument, by
 “ men of the first distinction for talents and learning in this country,
 “ both of the laity and the clergy, both in the establishment and out of it.

“ Their mode of reasoning and writing, it is true, is in general better
 “ suited to readers of a higher class than to the lower ranks of men;
 “ but the *principal and most striking arguments in each may easily be*
 “ *drawn out from the rest, may be cast into a more popular form, and brought*
 “ *down to the understandings of the common people.* And if this, or any
 “ thing of a similar nature, was thrown into a regular course of Sermons
 “ or Lectures, and delivered in easy, intelligible, familiar language, to
 “ your respective congregations, I know nothing that would, in these
 “ philosophic times, render a more essential service to religion, or

“ tend more to preserve the principles of those entrusted to your care
 “ uncorrupted and unshaken by those most pernicious and dangerous
 “ publications, which I have too much reason to apprehend will very soon
 “ be disseminated, with dreadful industry and activity, through every
 “ quarter of this island.

“ The apprehensions here expressed have been since verified by the
 “ appearance of certain publications, the most offensive, and in some
 “ respects the most dangerous that, perhaps, ever before insulted the
 “ religion of any Christian country. It is true that, in point of com-
 “ position and of argument, they are most contemptible; but the very
 “ meanness of their style, and the homeliness, the plainness, and the gross
 “ familiarity of their manner, are but too well adapted to the taste and
 “ apprehensions of those readers whom they are meant to captivate. This
 “ is a *new* species of infidel writing very recently introduced amongst us.
 “ Hitherto we have had to contend only with the Tolands, the Tindals,
 “ the Bolingbokes, and the Humes, of the age: men whose writings
 “ could fall only into the hands of a few in the higher ranks of life, and
 “ were not likely to make much impression on well-informed minds.
 “ But the pieces to which I allude are addressed to the *multitude*, and are
 “ most dexterously brought down to the level of their understandings; they
 “ compress the whole poison of infidelity into the narrow compass of an
 “ *essence*, or an *extract*, and render *irreligion easy* to the meanest capacity.
 “ They are, in short, most artful snares, laid for those numerous and
 “ *valuable classes* of men who have hitherto escaped the contagion either
 “ of Atheism or Deism, the *mechanic, the manufacturer, the tradesman,*
 “ *the farmer, the servant, the labourer.* On these (to whom the subject
 “ is quite *new*, and who have neither time nor talents for examining
 “ questions of this nature), the bold assertions, the intrepid blasphemies,
 “ and coarse buffooneries, which constitute the whole merit and character
 “ of these productions, are perfectly well calculated to impose and to
 “ stand in the place of argument and proof. It was by small tracts
 “ of this sort, disseminated among the lower orders in every part of
 “ France, that the great body of the people there was prepared for that most
 “ astonishing event, (which without such preparations, could never have been
 “ so suddenly and so generally brought about,) THE PUBLIC RENUNCIA-
 “ TION OF THE CHRISTIAN FAITH. In order to produce the *very same*
 “ effect here, and to pave the way for a *general apostacy from the Gospel*, by
 “ contaminating the principles, and shaking the faith of the inferior classes of
 “ the people, the same arts have been employed, the same little breviates of
 “ infidelity have, to my knowledge, been published and dispersed with great
 “ activity,

“ activity, and at a considerable expence, among the middling and lower ranks
 “ of people in this country. It behoves therefore every Minister of the Gos-
 “ pel, who has the honour of his Divine Master and interests of his religion
 “ at heart, to *watch most carefully* the progress of such pestilential writings ;
 “ which, though perhaps not much known or talked of in public, may be
 “ *secretly and silently* undermining the foundations of religion, and weak-
 “ ening its hold *on the public mind*, at a time when we stand most in need
 “ of its aid and support.”

Of the Sermons of this truly PASTORAL Prelate I have inserted in my Collection no fewer than five. They appear to me peculiarly adapted to my purpose, which was, to supply a copious collection of Divinity worthy the attention of the most learned, yet, in *general*, not above the understanding of the common reader. Sermons have too often soared out of sight of the vulgar. The learned preacher, in the desire of shewing his ability, has often written solely for universities and learned professors ; for those who perhaps wanted neither theological nor moral instruction. In the mean time, THE POOR HAD NOT THE GOSPEL PREACHED TO THEM. Bishop PORTEUS has attained to that happy union of unaffected elegance, with plainness and popularity of manner, which renders his Discourses equally agreeable to the accomplished scholar in the closet, and to the crowded and mixed congregation. He has a neatness of style far above carelessness, but not affecting the pompous obscurity of what the lower classes stigmatize and detest by the name of *hard words* and high-flown language. He has happily blended taste and learning with that SPIRIT OF PIETY which gives the most genuine favour to religious discourse. Without this, the most polished periods, the most profound erudition, are in the ears of the PEOPLE, but as *sounding brass and tinkling cymbals*. Without this, the best composed Sermons neither please the palate of the pious, nor afford nutrition.

Though I value highly the esteem of estimable men, yet I court no man's favour for the sake of advantage, and mean not to disgrace myself by insincere commendation. My praise, indeed, will not be considered, by the object of it, as flattery. Flattery has not been my vice. My judgment approved the Sermons of Bishop PORTEUS. I knew that the *weight of his high office and character* would add to their force. I should have inserted more than five, if I had chosen to take so great a liberty. The liberty I have already taken, I *am certain* the Bishop will not disapprove. I am convinced that he is always ready to contribute to the diffusion of good by the instrumentality of others, as he has ever been himself active in works of beneficence. He was long a faithful labourer in the pulpit, before he

was exalted to a mitre; and even now, though a general in the ecclesiastical army, often descends to the ranks, and zealously performs the duty of a private. If such men were always placed in the posts of honour, it would contribute more to serve the cause of religion, than any laboured defences of it by argumentation, little understood and less relished by the people. But I must add no more on a topic, which I know his delicacy would prohibit, if he had the power of denying an *imprimatur*. He wants not my praise, and will probably despise it.

I have been the rather inclined to dwell on the character of such Bishops, because EPISCOPACY itself, in the present age, is considered as in danger; and because it can be supported by no means so effectually as by convincing mankind, that the order is conducive to the happiness, as well as to the ornament of society. The personal merits of the Bishops, are the firmest supports of the bench. I have, for this reason, among others, inserted many Sermons from *Bishops and Archbishops*. They reflect a lustre on the order which envy cannot fully. But it must be confessed, that, excepting those of Bishop PORTEUS, they are all from those Prelates who have departed from this turbulent scene, and are gone to receive the reward of good and faithful servants,

As to single and occasional Sermons on Fast Days, and on the Thirtieth of January, few of them were ever intended for popular and general instruction, and scarcely any were conducive to the grand purpose of Christianity—the MELIORATION of HUMAN NATURE. They might be very proper, as serving the temporary purposes of the state; but they were not particularly calculated for the promotion of faith and practice. Such slight performances are by no means like the labours of a Tillotson, a Beveridge, a Sherlock, and a Secker, a *κρηνα εις αιε*, a legacy to the people at large, the benefit of which descends to the latest posterity.

It is indubitably certain that, from the pulpit discourses of these departed prelates, the mitre received more lustre than it conferred. Let us only consider the last of them, whom many of us still remember, Archbishop SECKER. He spoke like one having authority, yet with great simplicity. In several of his most commanding discourses there is scarcely a word unintelligible to the poorest mechanic, who *hungers and thirsts after righteousness*. Exalted as he was in station, his pulpit was the throne in which he chiefly delighted. Look at his numerous volumes of discourses, you will find that he laboured more abundantly in doing good, when he might have commanded all the ease of luxurious opulence, and reposed in the indolent, useless

useless contemplation of his own acquired grandeur. He used the advantages of a most honourable and exalted station, not so much to gratify himself, as to become more extensively useful to others by his earnest exhortations from the pulpit. His rank added weight to his words. His Sermons are well adapted to this Collection; and I have the satisfaction of knowing that several which I have selected, are particularly approved by one who was trained in his school, and who follows his steps, the present Bishop of London.

I cannot, consistently with my limits, do justice to the merits of all the great prelates who adorn and enrich my book. But to omit the particular mention of Bishop WILSON would be highly culpable. He appears to me to approach as nearly to the character of a true apostle of Jesus Christ, as it is possible in this sublunary state. He is indeed *meet* for the people. He is a truly evangelical preacher; and happy they who are not too much *refined* to relish the purest piety unadorned with elegance.

Upon the whole, they who consider the names of the Bishops and Archbishops who contribute to this Volume, will congratulate the country, that episcopacy has not degenerated here as it did in France; where a man of merit, who rose from an humble station to the mitre, was despised by the *Nobles* of his own order, and contemptuously called *un Eveque de la Fortune*. To avow a real belief of Christianity, was deemed among some of those *nobly-born* Prelates, a mark of weakness which justified supreme contempt, and even exclusion from their convivial society.

The insertion of many Sermons from the works of our great prelates serves two purposes of importance. It not only vindicates the episcopal order from the detraction of gainfayers, who certainly abound in the present age; but adds weight to the general mass of instruction contained in this volume. High stations in the church are naturally considered by the people as the rewards of singular learning, distinguished piety, powerful eloquence, and indefatigable industry *in the work of the Lord*. An excellent discourse from the mouth of an Archbishop or Bishop impresses a mixed congregation more forcibly than from an undignified divine; because rank and title excite an attention in the multitude similar to religious awe. We are so made as to be greatly influenced by worldly state and grandeur, and they are then truly beneficial to society, when used instrumentally to enforce with better effect, piety, benevolence, and *whatsoever things are of good report*.

But

But though high ecclesiastical rank in a church so constituted as that of England, adds weight in the minds of the people to all instruction from the pulpit; and though it was therefore desirable to fill a great part of a popular Collection with the Sermons of distinguished Prelates; yet, for the honour of the INFERIOR CLERGY as they are called, it must be said that they have, at all times since the Reformation, produced Sermons of distinguished merit, adorned with graces unindebted to the sunshine of Court Favour. This Book, much as it is enriched by the labours of prelacy, is still under greater obligations to the inferior Clergy. GLOUCESTER RIDLEY appears to me a Divine of the first rank, and his Sermons on the Holy Ghost of the first importance. He has treated the doctrine of Grace, the most momentous and consolatory to frail mortal men of all doctrines, with a depth of learning and solidity of argument, which must convince and comfort all who are unshackled by invincible prejudice. He is clear, though deep; and popularly eloquent, though most ingeniously argumentative. The doctrine of Grace being once well proved, as he has proved it, a reasonable mind will want no farther evidences of Christianity. In Dr. JORTIN are contained profound learning, sober reason, warm philanthropy, a most liberal spirit, a most amiable candour, manly piety, and Christian humility. I knew him well, and loved his gentle virtues, while I admired his various erudition. His Sermons are calculated for the most rational Christians. An ardent lover of truth and honesty, he followed their dictates wherever they led, seeking the happiness of his fellow-creatures, and careless of his own fortune: but a HERRING fortunately filled the See of Canterbury during his time, and sought out that merit which concealed itself in the shade of obscurity. No act of that Archbishop, no splendid figure in the forms of a Court, ever reflected so much honour on him as the unsolicited patronage of JORTIN. HERRING was indeed a good man; but JORTIN was a greater in every thing but official elevation: the Archbishop knew it, and exerted himself to compensate the injuries of fortune. Dr. JOSEPH TRAPP, though a moderate Poet, was a most zealous and able Divine: there is the charm of apparent sincerity in all his discourses. His zeal in defending Christianity was great; and his knowledge equalled his zeal. JEREMIAH SEED adorns his Discourses with every grace of elegant and sentimental composition. He is indeed flowery, but his flowers are not gaudy without fragrance; they abound with honey, and are the pleasant harbingers of autumnal plenty. He is by no means superficial, though florid; he is indeed a very solid writer, but often conceals the thorns of argument under the roses of imagination.

But

But it is inconsistent with a cursory Preface, like this, to enter into a minute detail on the merits of all the excellent Writers, in the rank of inferior Clergy, who have joined their labours to complete this Volume. I am confident, both from actual observation and general opinion, that they have all a very considerable portion of excellence: their individual merit is indeed various in kind, but *for that very reason the better calculated in the aggregate, for general acceptance: there is something on the table agreeable to every palate*. It has been my endeavour so to select the Discourses, as to adapt them to the various degrees of intellect and acquired knowledge which occur in the mass of the people: hence there is a Bentley for philosophers, and a Wilson for the plain Christian, who seeks no other wisdom than that which leadeth to salvation.

To praise one's own compositions would indeed be insufferable; but there can be no violation of delicacy in speaking with confidence in praise of those whom the public voice once loudly celebrated, and who are confessed by the best judges to have been the ornaments, not only of the Church, but of English literature. There is scarcely one, I think, in the Collection whose character is not fixed, and out of the reach of malevolent detraction; it is unnecessary therefore to expatiate any farther in their praise: they form an honourable phalanx of chosen men, fighting with the arms of peace on the side of all that is good, great, and lovely. May they triumph over evil and misery, rescue poor captive mortals from the slavery of sin and death, and conduct them, under the great Captain of Salvation, to a glorious immortality!

It is, I confess, a source of consolation to reflect, that, though possessing few opportunities of affording instruction (such as my mediocrity might furnish) from the pulpit, I am still enabled to do good in my generation, and to supply the defect by preaching to thousands and tens of thousands, wherever the English language is understood, by means of this Compilation. The First Volume, which certainly abounds in useful and beautiful Discourses, has already received the sanction of public approbation. It has speedily passed through two considerable impressions, and a new edition is now in the press, which will be greatly improved. Both the Volumes together form a Collection, which, in copiousness of matter and celebrity of authors, has never been equalled in this or any other country. May they be candidly accepted. May they do the good intended; and the Editor trusts he shall not be without that best reward, an approving conscience.

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FAMILY

FAMILY LECTURES:

OR

A COPIOUS COLLECTION

OF

S E R M O N S,

Selected from the most CELEBRATED DIVINES,

On FAITH and PRACTICE.

S E R M O N I.

By RICHARD BENTLEY, D. D.

[Preached March 7, 1691-2.]

The Folly of Atheism, and (what is now called) Deism; even with respect to the present Life.

PSALM xiv. 1.

The Fool hath said in his heart, There is no God; they are corrupt, they have done abominable works, there is none that doth good.

I SHALL not now make any inquiry about the time and occasion and other circumstances of composing this Psalm; nor how it comes to pass, that with very little variation we have it twice over. Not that these and such like are not important considerations in themselves; but that I think them improper now, when we are to argue and expostulate with such persons as allow no divine authority to our text; and profess no greater, or, it may be they will say, less veneration for these

sacred hymns, than for the profane songs of Anacreon or Horace. So that although I myself do really believe, that all such as *say in their hearts, There is no God,* are *foolish* and *corrupt*, both in understanding and will; because I see infinite wisdom itself has pronounced them to be so: nevertheless this argument would at present have no force upon these men, till in due time and method we have evinced the sufficient authority of holy scripture. But however there are other books extant, which they must needs allow of as proper evidence; even the mighty volumes of visible nature, and the everlasting tables of right reason; wherein, if they do not wilfully shut their eyes, they may read their own folly written by the finger of God, in a much plainer and more terrible sentence, than Belshazzar's by the hand upon the wall. (Dan. v. 5.)

And as the impious principles of these persons do preclude any argumentation from the revealed word of God; so they prevent us also from speaking at present to the second part of the text. The

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whole verse hath apparently two propositions; the one denoting the folly of atheism, *The Fool hath said in his heart, There is no God*: the second declaring the corruption and flagitiousness of life which naturally attend it; *They are corrupt, they have done abominable works, there is none that doth good*. Now this latter part to a genuine atheist is mere jargon, as he loves to call it; an empty sound of words without any signification. He allows no natural morality, nor any other distinction of good and evil, just and unjust, than as human institution and the modes and fashions of various countries denominate them. The most heroic actions or detestable villanies are in the nature of things indifferent to his approbation; if by secrecy they are alike concealed from rewards or punishments, from ignominy or applause. So that till we have proved in its proper place the eternal and essential difference between virtue and vice, we must forbear to urge atheists with the corruption and abominableness of their principles. But I presume, the first part of the text, the folly of atheism, (which shall be the subject of this discourse,) will be allowed to come home to their case; since they make such a noisy pretence to wit and sagacity; and I believe several of them first engage in that labyrinth of nonsense and folly, from an absurd and preposterous affectation of seeming wiser than their neighbours.

But before I proceed any farther, it will be necessary to clear and vindicate this expression of the Psalmist, *The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God*. For I know not any interpreters that will allow it to be spoken of such as flatly deny the being of God; but of them, that, believing his existence, do yet seclude him from directing the affairs of the world, from observing and judging the actions of men. I suppose they might be induced to this, from the commonly received notion of an innate idea of God, imprinted upon every soul of man at their creation, in characters that can never be defaced. Whence it will follow, that speculative atheism does only subsist in our speculation; whereas really human nature cannot be guilty of the crime: that indeed a few sensual and voluptuous persons may for a season eclipse this native light of the soul; but can never so wholly smother and extinguish it, but that at

some lucid intervals it will recover itself again, and shine forth to the conviction of their conscience. And therefore they believed, that the words would not admit of a strict and rigorous interpretation; but ought to be so tempered and accommodated to the nature of things, as that they may describe those profane persons, who, though they do not, nor can really doubt in their hearts of the being of God, yet they openly deny his providence in the course of their lives. Now if this be all that is meant by the text, I do not see how we can defend, not only the fitness and propriety, but the very truth of the expression. As to that natural and indelible signature of God, which human souls in their first origin are supposed to be stamped with, I shall shew at a fitter opportunity that it is a mistake, and that we have no need of it in our disputes against atheism. So that, being free from that prejudice, I interpret the words of the text in the literal acceptation, which will likewise take in the expositions of others. For I believe that the royal Psalmist in this comprehensive brevity of speech, *There is no God*, hath included all the various forms of impiety; whether of such as excludes the Deity from governing the world by his providence, or judging it by his righteousness, or creating it by his wisdom and power. Because the consequence and result of all these opinions is terminated in downright atheism. For the divine inspection into the affairs of the world doth necessarily follow from the nature and being of God. And he that denies this, doth implicitly deny his existence; he may acknowledge what he will with his mouth, but *in his heart he hath said, There is no God*. *A God, therefore a providence*, was a general argument of virtuous men, and not peculiar to the Stoics alone. And again, *No providence, therefore no God*, was the most plausible reason, and the most frequent in the mouths of atheistical men. So that it seems to be agreed on all hands, that the existence of God and his government of the world do mutually suppose and imply one another.

There are some infidels among us, that not only disbelieve the Christian religion, but oppose the assertions of providence, of the immortality of the soul, of an universal judgment to come, and of any incorporeal essence: and yet to avoid the odious

odious name of atheists, would shelter and screen themselves under a new one of deists, which is not quite so obnoxious. But I think the text hath cut them short, and precluded this subterfuge; in as much as it hath declared, that all such wicked principles are coincident and all one in the issue with the rankest atheism: *The fool*, that doth exempt the affairs of the world from the ordination and disposal of God, *hath said in his heart, There is no God* at all. It was the opinion of many of the ancients, that Epicurus introduced a deity into his philosophy, not because he was persuaded of his existence, (for when he had brought him upon the stage of nature, he made him only *muta persona*, and interdicted him from bearing any part in it,) but purely that he might not incur the offence of the magistrate. He was generally therefore suspected *verbis reliquisse Deum, re sustulisse*; to have framed on purpose such a contemptible paltry hypothesis about him, as indeed left the name and title of God in the world; but nothing of his nature and power. Just as a philosopher of our own age gave a ludicrous and fictitious notion about the rest of the earth, to evade the hard censure and usage which Galileo had lately met with. For my own part, as I do not exclude this reason from being a grand occasion of Epicurus's owning a God; so I believe that he and Democritus too were compelled to it likewise by the necessity of their own systems. For seeing they explained the phenomena of vision, imagination, and thought itself, by certain thin fleeces of atoms, that flow incessantly from the surfaces of bodies, and by their subtilty and fineness penetrate any obstacle, and yet retain the exact figures and lineaments of the several bodies from which they proceed; and in this manner insinuating themselves through the pores of human bodies into the contexture of the soul, do there excite sensation and perception of themselves: in consequence of this hypothesis they were obliged to maintain, that we could have no fancy, or idea, or conception of any thing, but what did really subsist either intire or in its several parts. Whence it followed, that mankind could have no imaginations of Jupiter or Mars, or Minerva or Isis; if there were not actually such beings in nature to emit those effluvia, which glide

into the soul must beget such imaginations. And thence it was, that those philosophers adapted their description of the deity to the vulgar apprehensions of those times; gods and goddesses innumerable, and all of human figure; because otherwise the conceptions of mankind about them could not possibly be accounted for by their physiology. So that if Epicurus and Democritus were in earnest about their philosophy, they did necessarily and really believe the existence of the gods. But then as to the nature and authority of them; they bereaved that Jupiter of his thunder and majesty: forbidding him to look or peep abroad, so much as to enquire what news in the infinite space about him; but to content himself and be happy with an eternal laziness and dozing, unless some rambling troops of atoms upon the dissolution of a neighbouring world might chance to awake him. Now because no Israelite in the days of the Psalmist is likely to have been so curious about natural knowledge, as to believe the being of God for such a quaint and airy reason as this, when he had once boldly denied his dominion over the world; and since there is not now one infidel living, so ridiculous as to pretend to solve the phenomena of sight, fancy or cogitation by those fleeting superficial films of bodies: I must beg leave to think, both that the *fool* in the text was a thorough confirmed atheist; and that the modern disguised deists do only call themselves so for the former reason of Epicurus, to decline the public odium and resentment of the magistrate; and that they cover the most arrant atheism under the mask and shadow of a deity: by which they understand no more, than some eternal inanimate matter, some universal nature, and soul of the world, void of all sense and cogitation, so far from being endowed with infinite wisdom and goodness. And therefore in this present discourse they may deservedly come under that character which the text hath given of them, of *fools that have said in their hearts, There is no God*.

And now having thus far cleared our way; in the next place we shall offer some notorious proofs of the gross folly and stupidity of atheists.

If a person that had a fair estate in reversion, which in all probability he would

B 2 **speedily**

speedily be possessed of, and of which he might reasonably promise to himself a long and happy enjoyment, should be assured by some skilful physician, that in a very short time he would inevitably fall into a disease, which would so totally deprive him of his understanding and memory, that he should lose the knowledge of all things without him, nay all consciousness and sense of his own person and being: If, I say, upon a certain belief of this indication, the man should appear overjoyed at the news, and be mightily transported with the discovery and expectation; would not all that saw him be astonished at such behaviour? Would they not be forward to conclude, that the distemper had seized him already, and even then the miserable creature was become a meer fool and an idiot? Now the conduct of our atheists or deists is infinitely more amazing than this; no dotage so infatuate, no frenzy so extravagant as theirs: They have been educated in a religion that instructed them in the knowledge of a supreme being; a spirit most excellently glorious, superlatively powerful and wise and good, creator of all things out of nothing; that hath endued the sons of men, his peculiar favourites, with a rational spirit, and hath placed them as spectators in this noble theatre of the world, to view and applaud these glorious scenes of earth and heaven, the workmanship of his hands; that hath furnished them in general with a sufficient store of all things, either necessary or convenient for life; and particularly to such as fear and obey him, hath promised a supply of all wants, a deliverance and protection from all dangers: *that they that seek him, shall want no manner of thing that is good.* Psal. xxxiv. 9. Who besides his munificence to them in this life; *hath so loved the world, that he sent his only begotten son* (John, iii. 16.), the express image of his substance, and partaker of his eternal nature and glory, to *bring life and immortality to light* (2 Tim. i. 10.), and to tender them to mankind upon fair and gracious terms; that if they submit to his *easy yoke, and light burden* (Matth. xi. 30.), and observe his commandments *which are not grievous* (1 Joh. v. 3.), he then gives them the *promise of eternal salvation* (Heb. v. 9.); he hath reserved for them in heaven an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and

that fadeth not away (1 Pet. i. 4.); he hath prepared for them an unspeakable, unconceivable perfection of joy and bliss, *things that eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man.* (1 Cor. ii. 9.) What a delightful and ravishing hypothesis of religion is this? And in this religion they have had their education. Now let us suppose some great professor in atheism to suggest to some of these men, that all this is mere dream and imposture; that there is no such excellent being, as they suppose, that created and preserves them; that all about them is dark senseless matter, driven on by the blind impulses of fatality and fortune; that men first sprung up, like mushrooms, out of the mud and slime of the earth; and that all their thoughts, and the whole of what they call soul, are only various action and repercussion of small particles of matter, kept awhile a moving by some mechanism and clock-work, which finally must cease and perish by death. If it be true then (as we daily find it is) that men listen with complacency to these horrid suggestions; if they let go their hope of everlasting life with willingness and joy; if they entertain the thoughts of final perdition with exultation and triumph; ought they not to be esteemed most notorious fools, even destitute of common sense, and abandoned to a callousness and numbness of soul?

What then, is heaven itself, with its *pleasures for evermore* (2 Tim. iv. 8.), to be parted with so unconcernedly? Is a *crown of righteousness, a crown of life* (Jam. i. 12.), to be surrendered with laughter? is an *exceeding and eternal weight of glory* (2 Cor. iv. 17.) too light in the balance against the hopeless death of the atheist, and utter extinction? It was a noble saying of the emperor Marcus, That he would not endure to live one day in the world, if he did not believe it to be under the government of providence. Let us but imagine that excellent person comforted and satisfied by some Epicurean of his time; that all was but atoms, and vacuum, and necessity, and chance. Would he have been so pleased and delighted with the conviction? would he have so triumphed in being overcome? or rather, as he hath told us, would he not have gone down with sorrow and despair to the grave? Did I but once see an atheist lament

ment and bewail himself; that upon a strict and impartial examination he had found to his cost, that all was a mistake; that the prerogative of human nature was vanished and gone; those glorious hopes of immortality and bliss, nothing but cheating joys and pleasant delusions; that he had undone himself by losing the comfortable error, and would give all the world to have better arguments for religion; there would be great hopes of prevailing upon such an atheist as this. But, alas! there are none of them of this temper of mind; there are none that *understand and seek after God* (Psal. xiv. 2.); they have *no knowledge* (ver. 4.), nor any desire of it; they *thrust the word of God from them, and judge themselves unworthy of everlasting life*, (Acts, xiii. 46.); they willingly prefer darkness before light, and obstinately chuse to perish for ever in the grave, rather than be heirs of salvation in the resurrection of the just. These certainly are the *fools* in the text, indocil intractable fools, whose stolidity can baffle all arguments, and be proof against demonstration itself; *whose end* (as the words of St. Paul do truly describe them) *whose end* and very hope *is destruction*, an eternal deprivation of being; *whose God is their belly*, the gratification of sensual lusts; *whose glory is in their shame*, in the debasing of mankind to the condition of beasts; *who mind earthly things* (Phil. iii. 19.), who if (like that great apostle) they were *caught up to the third heaven* (2 Cor. xii. 2.), would (as the spies did of Canaan) *bring down an evil report* (Num. xiii. 32.) of those regions of bliss. And I fear, unless it please God by extraordinary methods *to help their unbelief* (Mar. ix. 24.), and *enlighten the eyes of their understanding* (Eph. i. 19.); they will carry their atheism with them to the pit; and the flames of hell only must convince them of their error.

This supine and inconsiderate behaviour of the atheists is so extremely absurd, that it would be deemed incredible, if it did not occur to our daily observation; it proclaims aloud, that they are not led astray by their reasoning, but led captive by their lusts to the denial of God. When the very pleasures of paradise are contemned and trampled on, like pearls cast before swine, there is small hope of reclaiming them by arguments of reason. But however, as Solomon adviseth, we will answer these *fools not according to their*

folly, lest we also be like unto them (Prov. xxvi. 4.). It is expedient that we *put to silence the ignorance of these foolish men*, that believers may be the more confirmed and more resolute in the faith.

Did religion bestow heaven without any terms or conditions indifferently upon all; if the crown of life was hereditary, and free to good and bad; and not settled by covenant upon the elect of God only, such as *live soberly and righteously and godly in this present world* (Tit. ii. 12.): I believe there would be no such thing as an infidel among us. And without controversy it is the way and means of attaining to heaven, that makes profane scorners so willingly let go the expectation of it. It is not the articles of the creed, but the duty to God and their neighbour, that is such an inconsistent incredible legend. They will not practise the rules of religion, and therefore they cannot believe the promises and rewards of it.

But, however, let us suppose them to have acted like rational and serious men; and perhaps upon a diligent inquisition they have found, that the hope of immortality deserves to be joyfully quitted, and that either out of interest, or necessity.

I. And first, One may conceive indeed, how there might possibly be a necessity of quitting it. It might be tied to such terms, as would render it impossible ever to be obtained. For example, if it should be required of all the candidates of glory and immortality, to give a full and knowing assent to such things as are repugnant to common sense, as contradict the *νομοι* *ενομοι*, the universal notions and indubitable maxims of reason; if they were to believe, that one and the same thing may be and not be at the same time and in the same respect; if allowing the received ideas and denominations of numbers and figures and body, they must seriously affirm, that two and two do make a dozen, or that the diameter of a circle is as long as the circumference, or that the same body may be all of it in distant places at once; I must confess that the offers of happiness upon such articles of belief as these, would be mere tantalizing of rational creatures; and the kingdom of heaven would become the inheritance of only idiots and fools. For whilst a man of common capacity doth think and re-

flect upon such propositions, he cannot possibly bribe his understanding to give a verdict for their truth. So that he would be quite frustrated of the hope of reward, upon such unpracticable conditions as these: neither could he have any evidence of the reality of the promise, superior to what he is conscious to of the falsity of the means. Now if any atheist can shew me in the system of the Christian religion any such absurdities and repugnances to our natural faculties; I will either evince them to be interpolations and corruptions of the faith, or yield myself a captive and a proselyte to his infidelity.

II. Or, 2dly, they may think it is the interest of mankind, that there should be no heaven at all; because the labour to acquire it is more worth than the purchase: God almighty (if there be one) having much overvalued the blessings of his presence. So that upon a fair estimation, it is a greater advantage to take one's swing in sensuality, and have a glut of voluptuousness in this life, freely resigning all pretences to future happiness; which, when a man is once extinguished by death, he cannot be supposed either to want or desire; than to be tied up by commandments and rules so contrary to flesh and blood; to *take up one's cross, to deny himself* (Mark, viii. 34.), and refuse the satisfaction of natural desires. This indeed is the true language of atheism, and the cause of it too. Were not this at the bottom, no man in his wits could condemn and ridicule the expectation of immortality. Now what power or influence can religion have upon the minds of these men; while not only their affections and lusts, but their supposed interest, shall plead against it? But if we can once silence this powerful advocate; we shall without much difficulty carry the cause at the bar of impartial reason.

Now here is a notorious instance of the folly of atheists, that while they repudiate all title to the kingdom of heaven, merely for the present pleasure of body, and their boasted tranquillity of mind; besides the extreme madness in running such a desperate hazard after death, (which I will not now treat of,) they deprive themselves here of that very pleasure and tranquillity they seek for. For I shall now endeavour to shew, That religion itself gives us the greatest delights

and advantages even in this life also, though there should prove in the event to be no resurrection to another. *Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace* (Prov. iii. 17.).

But before I begin that, I must occur to one specious objection both against this proposition and the past part of my discourse; namely, that religion doth perpetually haunt and disquiet us with dismal apprehensions of everlasting burnings in hell; and that there is no shelter or refuge from those fears, but behind the principles of atheism.

(1.) First, therefore, I will freely acknowledge to the atheists, that some part of what hath been said is not directly conclusive against them; if they say, that before they revolted from the faith, they had sinned away all expectation of ever arriving at heaven: and consequently had good reason so joyfully to receive the news of annihilation by death, as an advantageous change for the everlasting torments of the damned. But because I cannot expect, that they will make such a shameless and senseless confession, and supply us with that invincible argument against themselves: I must say again, that to prefer final extinction before a happy immortality, does declare the most deplorable stupidity. Nay, although they should confess, that they believed themselves to be reprobates, before they disbelieved religion; and took atheism as a sanctuary and refuge from the terrors of hell; yet still the imputation of folly will stick upon them: in as much as they chose atheism as an opiate to still those frightening apprehensions, by inducing a dulness and lethargy of mind; rather than make use of that active and salutary medicine, a hearty repentance; that they did not know the *riches of the goodness and forbearance and long-suffering of God* (Rom. ii. 4.), and that a sincere amendment of life was never too late, nor in vain; *Jesus Christ being the saviour of all men* (1 Tim. iv. 10.), and a *propitiation for the sins of the whole world* (1 Joh. v. 14.); *who came into the world to save sinners, even the chief of them all* (1 Tim. i. 15.); and *died for the ungodly, and his bitterest enemies* (Rom. v. 6—10.).

(2.) And secondly, As to the fears of damnation; those terrors are not to be charged upon religion itself, which proceed

ceed either from the want of religion, or superstitious mistakes about it. For as an honest and innocent man doth know the punishments, which the laws of his country denounce against felons and murderers and traitors, without being terrified or concerned at them: So a Christian in truth as well as in name, though he believe the consuming vengeance prepared for the disobedient and unbelievers, is not at all dismayed at the apprehensions of it. Indeed it adds spurs, and gives wings to his diligence, it excites him to *work out his salvation with fear and trembling* (Phil. ii. 12.); a religious and ingenuous fear, that is tempered with hope and with love and unspeakable joy. But he knows, that if he fears him who is *able to destroy both soul and body in hell* (Matth. x. 28.), he needs not fear that his own soul or body shall ever go thither.

I allow that some debauched and profligate wretches, or some designing perfidious hypocrites, that are religious in outward profession, but corrupt and abominable in their works, are most justly as well as usually liable to these horrors of mind. It is not my business to defend or excuse such as these; I must leave them, as long as they keep their hardness and impenitent hearts, to those gnawing and excruciating fears, those whips of the divine Nemesis, that frequently scourge even atheists themselves. For the atheists also can never wholly extinguish those horrible forebodings of conscience. They endeavour indeed to compose and charm their fears, but a thousand occasions daily awaken the sleepy tormentors. Any slight consideration either of themselves, or of any thing without; whatsoever they think on, or whatsoever they look on; all administer some reasons for suspicion and diffidence, lest POSSIBLY THEY MAY BE IN THE WRONG; and then it is a *fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God* (Heb. x. 31.): *There they are in great fear*, as it is in the 5th verse of this psalm, under terrible presages of *judgment and fiery indignation*. (Heb. x. 27.) Neither can they say, that these terrors, like tales about spectres, may disturb some small pretenders and puny novices, but dare not approach the *veri adepts* (the true adepts), the masters and rabbies of atheism. For it is well known both from ancient and modern experience, that the very boldest of them, out of their debauches and company,

when they chance to be surpris'd with solitude or sickness, are the most suspicious and timorous and despondent wretches in the world: and that the boasted happy atheist in the indolence of body, and an undisturbed calm and serenity of mind, is altogether as rare a creature, as the *vir sapiens* (the wise man) was among the stoics; whom they often met with in idea and description, in harangues and in books, but freely owned that he never had or was like to exist actually in nature.

And now as to the present advantages which we owe to religion, they are very conspicuous; whether we consider mankind, (1.) separately, or (2.) under society and government.

1. And first, in a single capacity. How is a good Christian animated and cheered by a stedfast belief of the promises of the gospel; of an everlasting enjoyment of perfect felicity, such as after millions of millions of ages is still youthful and flourishing and inviting as at the first? no wrinkles in the face, no gray hairs on the head of eternity; no end, no diminution, no satiety of those delights. What a warm and vigorous influence does a religious heart feel from a firm expectation of these glories? Certainly this hope alone is of inestimable value; it is a kind of anticipation and pledge of those joys; and at least gives him one heaven upon earth, though the other should prove a delusion. Now what are the mighty promises of atheism in competition with these? let us know the glorious recompences it proposes: utter extinction and cessation of being; to be reduced to the same condition, as if we never had been born. O dismal reward of infidelity! at which nature shrinks and shivers with horror. What some of the most learned Doctors among the Jews have esteemed the most dreadful of all punishment, and have assigned for the portion of the blackest criminals of the damned; so interpreting Tophet, Abaddon, the vale of slaughter and the like, for final excision and deprivation of being: this atheism exhibits to us, as an equivalent to heaven. It is well known, what hath been disputed among schoolmen to this effect. And it is an observation of Plutarch, that the generality of mankind, *ἄνθρωποι καὶ γυναῖκες*, (*as well women as men*), chose rather to endure all the punishments of hell, as described by the poets; than part with the hope of

immortality, though immortal only in misery. I easily grant, that this would be a very hard bargain; and that, not to be at all, is more eligible, than to be miserable always: our Saviour himself having determined the question; *Wo to that man, by whom the son of man is betrayed; good were it for that man, if he had never been born* (Mark, xiv. 2.). But however thus much it evidently shews, that this desire of immortality is a natural affection of the soul; it is self-preservation in the highest and truest meaning; it is interwoven in the very frame and constitution of man. How then can the atheist reflect on his own hypothesis without extreme sorrow and dejection of spirit? Will he say, that when once he is dead, this desire will be nothing; and that he that is not, cannot lament his annihilation? So indeed it would be hereafter, according to his principles. But nevertheless, for the present, while he continues in life (which we now speak of) that dusky scene of horror, that melancholy prospect of final perdition will frequently occur to his fancy; the sweetest enjoyments of life will often become flat and insipid, will be damped and extinguished, be embittered and poisoned by the malignant and venomous quality of this opinion.

Is it not more comfortable to a man, to think well of himself, to have a high value and conceit of the dignity of his nature, to believe a noble origination of his race, the offspring and image of the great king of glory: rather than that men first proceeded, as vermin were once thought to do, by the sole influence of the sun from dirt and putrefaction?

Is it not a firmer foundation for contentment and tranquillity, to believe that all things were at first created, and are since continually ordered and disposed for the best, and that principally for the benefit and pleasure of man: than that the whole universe is mere bungling and blundering; no art or contrivance to be seen in it; nothing effected for any purpose and design; but all ill-favouredly cobbled and jumbled together by the unguided agitation and rude shuffles of matter?

Can any man wish a better support under affliction, than the friendship and favour of omnipotence, of infinite wisdom and goodness; that is both able and willing, and knows how to relieve him?

Such a man *can do all things through Christ that strengtheneth him* (Phil. iv. 13.), he can patiently suffer all things with cheerful submission and resignation to the divine will. He has a secret spring of spiritual joy, and the continual feast of a good conscience within, that forbid him to be miserable. But what a forlorn destitute creature is the atheist in distress? He hath no friend in extremity, but poison or a dagger, or a halter or a precipice. A violent death is the last refuge of the Epicureans, as well as the Stoics. This, says Lucretius, is the distinguishing character of a genuine son of our sect, that he will not endure to live in exile, and want and disgrace, out of a vain fear of death; but dispatch himself resolutely into the state of eternal sleep and insensibility. And yet for all this swaggering, not one of a hundred of them hath boldness enough to follow the direction. The base and degenerate saying of one of them is very well known, That life is always sweet, and he should still desire to prolong it; though, after he had been maimed and distorted by the rack, he should lastly be condemned to hang on a gibbet.

And then, as to the practical rules and duties of religion: as the miracles of our Lord are peculiarly eminent above the lying wonders of dæmons, in that they were not made out of vain ostentation of power, and to raise unprofitable amazement; but for the real benefit and advantage of men, by feeding the hungry, healing all sorts of diseases, ejecting of devils, and reviving the dead: so likewise the commands which he hath imposed on his followers are not like the absurd ceremonies of pagan idolatry, the frivolous rites of their initiations and worship, that might look like incantation and magic, but had no tendency in their nature to make mankind the happier. Our Saviour hath enjoined us a *reasonable service* (Rom. xii. 1.); accommodated to the rational part of our nature. All his laws are in themselves, abstracted from any consideration of recompence, conducing to the temporal interest of them that observe them. For what can be more availing to a man's health, or his credit, or estate, or security in this world, than charity and meekness, than sobriety and temperance, than honesty and diligence in his calling? Do not pride and arrogance infallibly meet with contempt? Do not contentiousness and cruelty

cruelty and study of revenge seldom fail of retaliation? Are not envious and covetous, discontented and anxious minds tormentors to themselves? Do not we see, that slothful and intemperate and incontinent persons destroy their bodies with diseases, their reputations with disgrace, and their families with want? Are adultery and fornication forbidden only by Moses and Christ? or do not heathen lawgivers punish such enormities with fines or imprisonment, with exile or death? It was an objection of Julian the apostate, that there were no new precepts of morality in our religion: *Thou shalt not kill, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's wife.* Why all the world, says he, is agreed about these commandments: and in every country under heaven, there are laws and penalties made to enforce all the ten, excepting only the Sabbath and the worship of strange gods. We can answer him another way; but he may make our infidels ashamed to complain of those ordinances as hard impositions, which the sense of all nations has thought to be reasonable: which not only the philosophers of Greece and Italy and the ancient world, but the banians of Mogul, the talapoins of Siam, the mandarins of China, the moralists of Peru and Mexico, all the wisdom of mankind have declared to be necessary duties. Nay, if the atheists would but live up to the ethics of Epicurus himself, they would make few or no proselytes from the Christian religion. For none revolt from the faith for such things as are thought peculiar to christianity; not because they must *love and pray for their enemies* (Matth. v. 44.), but because they must not poison or stab them: not because they must not *look upon a woman to lust after her* (ver. 28.), but because they are much more restrained from committing the act. If wanton glances and lascivious thoughts had been permitted by the gospel, and only the gross act forbidden; they would have apostatized nevertheless. This we may conjecture from what Plato and others have told us, that it was commonly *απαρτην ενδοσθεν και επιθυμιων*, (*immoderate affections and lusts*), that in the very times of paganism induced men to be atheists. It seems their impure and brutal sensuality was too much confined by the religion of those countries, where even Venus and Bacchus had their temples. Let not

therefore voluptuous atheists lay all the fault of their sins upon the infirmity of human nature; nor plead that flesh and blood cannot resist those temptations, which have all their force and prevalence from long custom and inveterate habit. What enticement, what pleasure is there in common profane swearing? yet neither the fear of God nor of the law will persuade men to leave it. It is prevailing example that hath now made it fashionable, but it hath not always been so, nor will be hereafter. So other epidemical vices, they are rise and predominant only for a season, and must not be ascribed to human nature in the lump. In some countries intemperance is a necessary part of conversation; in others sobriety is a virtue universal, without any respect to the duties of religion. Nor can they say, that this is only the difference of climate, that inclines one nation to concupiscence and sensual pleasures; another to blood-thirstiness and desire of revenge. It would discover great ignorance in history, not to know that in all climates a whole people has been over-run with some recently invented or newly imported kind of vice, which their grandfathers never knew. In the latest accounts of the country of Guiana, we are told that the eating of human flesh is the beloved pleasure of those savages: two nations of them by mutual devouring are reduced to two handfuls of men. When the gospel of our Saviour was preached to them, they received it with gladness of heart; they could be brought to forego plurality of wives; though that be the main impediment to the conversion of the East Indies. But the great stumbling-block with these Americans, and the only rock of offence, was the forbidding them to eat their enemies: that irresistible temptation made them quickly to revolt and relapse into their infidelity. What must we impute this to? to the temperature of the air, to the nature of the soil, to the influence of the stars? Are these barbarians of man-eating constitutions, that they so hanker after this inhuman diet, which we cannot imagine without horror? Is not the same thing practised in other parts of that continent? Was it not so in Europe of old, and is it not now so in Africa? If an eleventh Commandment had been given, *Thou shalt not eat human flesh*; would not these cannibals have esteemed it more difficult than all

all the ten? And would not they have really had as much reason as our atheists, to plead the power of the temptation, and the propensity of flesh and blood? How impudent then are the atheists, that traduce the easy and gracious conditions of the gospel, as unreasonable and tyrannical impositions? *Are not God's ways equal, O ye children of destruction, and are not your ways unequal?*

II. Secondly and lastly, For the good influence of religion upon communities and governments, *habemus confitentes reos*; it is so apparent and unquestionable, that it is one of the objections of the atheist, that it was first contrived and introduced by politicians, to bring the wild and straggling herds of mankind under subjection and laws. *Out of thy own mouth shalt thou be judged, thou wicked servant* (Luke, xix. 22.). Thou sayest that the wise institutors of government, souls elevated above the ordinary pitch of men, thought religion necessary to civil obedience. Why then dost thou endeavor to undermine this foundation, to undo this cement of society, and to reduce all once again to thy imaginary state of nature, and original confusion? No community ever was or can be begun or maintained, but upon the basis of religion. What government can be imagined without judicial proceedings? and what methods of judicature without a religious oath? which implies and supposes an omniscient being, as conscious to its falsehood or truth, and a revenger of perjury. So that the very nature of an oath (and therefore of society also) is subverted by the atheist; who professeth to acknowledge nothing superior to himself, no omnipresent observer of the actions of men. For an atheist to compose a system of politics is as absurd and ridiculous, as Epicurus's sermons were about sanctity and religious worship. But there was hope, that the doctrine of absolute uncontrollable power and the formidable name of Leviathan might flatter and bribe the government into a toleration of infidelity. We need have no recourse to notion and supposition; we have sad experience and convincing example before us, what a rare constitution of government may be had in a whole nation of atheists. The natives of Newfoundland and New France in America, as they are said to live without any sense of religion, so they are

known to be destitute of its advantages and blessings; without any law or form of community; without any literature or sciences or arts; no towns, no fixed habitations, no agriculture, no navigation. And it is entirely owing to the power of religion, that the whole world is not at this time as barbarous as they. And yet I ought not to have called these miserable wretches a nation of atheists. They cannot be said to be of the atheist's opinion; because they have no opinion at all in the matter: They do not say in their hearts, *There is no God*; for they never once deliberated, if there was one or no. They no more deny the existence of a deity; than they deny the Antipodes, the Copernican system, or the *Satellites Jovis*: about which they have had no notion or conception at all. It is the ignorance of those poor creatures, and not their impiety: their ignorance as much to be pitied, as the impiety of the atheists to be detested and punished. It is of mighty importance to the government to put some timely stop to the spreading contagion of this *pestilence that walketh by day*, that dares to disperse its cursed seeds and principles in the face of the sun. The fool in the text had only said in his heart, *There is no God*: he had not spoken it aloud, nor openly blasphemed, in places of public resort. There is too much reason to fear, that some of all orders of men, even magistracy itself, have taken the infection: a thing of dreadful consequence and most imminent danger. Epicurus was somewhat wiser than ordinary, when he so earnestly advised his disciples against meddling in public affairs: He knew the nature and tendency of his own philosophy; that it would soon become suspected and odious to a government, if ever atheists were employed in places of trust. But because he had made one great rule superior to all, That every man's only good was pleasure of body and contentment of mind: hence it was that men of ambitious and turbulent spirits, that were dissatisfied and uneasy with privacy and retirement, were allowed by his own principle to engage in matters of state. And there they generally met with that fortune, which their master foresaw. Several cities of Greece that had made experiment of them in public concerns, drove them out, as incendiaries and pests of commonweals, by severe edicts and proclamations. Atheism

Atheism is by no means tolerable in the most private condition: but if it aspire to authority and power; if it acquire the command of an army or a navy; if it get upon the bench or into the senate, or on a throne: What then can be expected, but the basest cowardice and treachery, but the foulest prevarication in justice, but betraying and selling the rights and liberties of a people, but arbitrary government and tyrannical oppression? Nay, if atheism were once, as I may say, the national religion: it would make its own followers the most miserable of men; it would be the kingdom of Satan divided against itself; and the land would be soon brought to desolation. Josephus, that knew them, hath informed us, that the Sadducees, those Epicureans among the Jews, were not only rough and cruel to men of a different sect from their own; but perfidious and inhuman one towards another. This is the genuine spirit and the natural product of atheism. No man that adheres to that narrow and selfish principle, can ever be just or generous or grateful; unless he be sometime overcome by good nature and a happy constitution. No atheist, as such, can be a true friend, an affectionate relation, or a loyal subject. The appearance and show of mutual amity among them, is wholly owing to the smallness of their number, and to the obligations of a faction. It is like the friendship of pickpockets and highwaymen, that are said to observe strict justice among themselves, and never to defraud a comrade of his share of the booty. But if we could imagine a whole nation to be cut-purses and robbers; would there then be kept that square dealing and equity in such a monstrous den of thieves? And if atheism should be supposed to become universal in this nation, (which seems to be designed and endeavoured, though we know the gates of hell shall not be able to prevail,) farewell all ties of friendship and principles of honour; all love for our country and loyalty to our prince; nay, farewell all government and society itself, all professions and arts, and conveniencies of life, all that is laudable or valuable in the world.

May the Father of mercies and God of infinite wisdom reduce the foolish from their errors, and make them wise unto salvation; confirm the sceptical and wavering minds, and so prevent us, that stand

fast, in all our doings, and further us with his continual help, *that we may not be of them that draw back unto perdition, but of them that believe to the saving of the soul.* Amen.

SERMON II.

By SAMUEL CLARKE, D. D.

Of Faith in God.

HEB. xi. 6.

But without Faith, it is impossible to please him: For he that cometh to God, must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.

THE foregoing chapter is a very earnest and affectionate exhortation to the duty of faith. (Ver. 22.) *Let us draw near with a true heart, in full assurance of faith.* (Ver. 23.) *Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering.* (Ver. 37.) *For yet a little while, and he that shall come will come, and will not tarry: Now the just shall live by faith.* That this exhortation might not be ineffectual, for want of men's clearly understanding what the nature of the duty was, to which they were here so earnestly exhorted; the apostle, in the 1st verse of this chapter, proceeds to define distinctly what faith is, and wherein it consists. *Faith, saith he, is the substance of things hoped for,* (in the original it is, *the firm and assured expectation of things hoped for,*) *the evidence of things not seen.* And what those things are, which being not seen by sense, are yet made manifest by faith, he declares in the words of the text. They are, saith he, the being of God, and the rewards of the life to come. *He that cometh to God, must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.* There has prevailed in modern times, a very different and enthusiastic notion of faith; as if faith, under the gospel, was nothing but a confident reliance upon the merits of Christ, to do all that for us, which he on the contrary expressly requires that we should do for ourselves. When we have heartily endeavoured to obey the commandments of God; and have performed our duty really and sincerely, though very imperfectly; to rely them upon the merits and intercession

sion of Christ, for the acceptance of those imperfect though sincere endeavours; this is indeed the duty, and the comfort of a Christian, but it is not what the scripture usually calls faith. Faith is that firm belief of things at present not seen; that conviction upon the mind, of the truth of the promises and threatenings of God made known in the gospel; of the certain reality of the rewards and punishments of the life to come; which enables a man, in opposition to all the temptations of a corrupt world, to obey God, in expectation of an invisible reward hereafter. This is that faith, which in scripture is always represented as a moral virtue, nay as the principal moral virtue, and the root and spring of all other virtues; because it is an act, not of the understanding only, but also and chiefly of the will, so to consider impartially, to approve and embrace the doctrine of the gospel, as to make it the great rule of our life and actions. By this faith it is, that we must be justified; and by this it is, that the antients, whose example is celebrated in this eleventh chapter, *obtained*, as the apostle expresses it, *a good report*. The faith of Abraham was, that *he looked for a city which hath foundations*, even the heavenly Jerusalem spoken of in the prophecies, *whose builder and maker is God*, (ver. 10.) The faith of the other patriarchs was that *confessing themselves strangers and pilgrims on the earth*, they declared plainly that they sought a better country, that is, *an heavenly* (ver. 13. 16.). The faith of Moses was, that he chose rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; for he had respect unto the recompence of reward; and endured, as seeing him who is invisible (ver. 25, 26, 27.). The faith of the martyrs was, that they chose to be tortured, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection (ver. 35.). This is a very easy and intelligible notion of faith; and such a notion, as shows plainly, how faith is not a mere speculative act of the understanding, but a substantial practical moral virtue.

It is true, this is not indeed the only sense of the word, *faith*, in scripture; but it is the principal and most important sense of it. As may appear by considering, that all the variety of significations, in which the word is used in different places of scripture, may properly be reduced, for memory and distinctness sake,

to these which follow. 1st, The word, *faith*, in some places signifies that earnest trust and confidence in the power of God, to which in the apostles times was annexed the gift of working miracles. Thus (Matt. xvii. 20.) *if ye have faith* (says our Lord to his apostles) *as a grain of mustard seed*; (if ye have that trust in God, that particular kind of faith or dependence on him, that assured reliance on his power without doubt or wavering, required of you peculiarly at this time; if you have this faith, though ever so small in comparison, answerable in any measure to your present office and advantages;) *ye shall say to this mountain, remove hence to yonder place, and it shall remove*. This, was a faith required of the apostles at that particular time, and of them only. 2dly, In other passages, the word, *faith*, signifies the duty of veracity, faithfulness, or truth. Thus (Matt. xxiii. 23.) *ye have omitted the weightier matters of the law; judgment, mercy, and faith*; faith, that is, fidelity, truth, or faithfulness, in the discharge of any trust reposed in men. Analogous to which, it is also sometimes used for the trust itself, or the thing committed to our charge; thus (Rom. xii. 6.) *having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us; whether prophecy, let us prophesy according to the proportion of faith; or ministry, let us wait on our ministering*; [the phrase in our modern language is very difficult, and cannot well be understood without this observation:] *according to the proportion of faith*, that is, according to the nature and degree of the gift or the trust reposed in us, (whether it be prophecy or ministration or any other office which requires faithfulness in the performance of it,) so let every one of us discharge his respective duty. 3dly, Another and much more usual signification of the word, *faith*; is to denote the whole gospel of Christ, or the Christian religion, in opposition to the ritual works of the law of Moses. Thus (Acts, vi. 7.) *the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly, and a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith*; that is, embraced the gospel. Again, (Rom. iii. 28.) *A man is justified by faith, without the deeds of the law*; by faith, that is, by the conditions of the gospel. And, (Rom. x. 8.) *the word of faith, which we preach*; that is to say, the doctrine of the gospel. And indeed generally throughout all the Epistles, and in the book of the Acts, this is the

the constant signification of the word, *faith*. And the reason why the whole gospel is so often expressed by that name, is very obvious; [namely] because the great motives and promises of the gospel, are the invisible things of a future state, which can be discerned by faith only. Fourthly and lastly, In other places of scripture, the word, *faith*, signifies plainly and literally and in its most natural sense, a firm belief and persuasion; a firm belief, of the being, and attributes, and promises of God. Not, (as some understand it,) a confident credulity in they know not what, in whatever their teachers require them to believe; and that perhaps with so much the greater assurance, as the things are more absurd and unreasonable to be believed. Neither does *faith* signify, (as others have contended,) a groundless imaginary assurance, and confident reliance on our being unalterably, we know not why, in the favour of God. But it is a rational persuasion and firm belief, of his attributes discovered by nature, and of his promises made known in the gospel; so as thereby to govern and direct our lives. Thus the word is used in the 1st verse of this chapter, *faith is the substance* (a substantial well-grounded expectation) *of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen*. And in the words of the text, *without faith it is impossible to please God; for he that cometh to God, must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him*.

To come to God, signifies, according to the nature of the Jewish language, making profession of religion; undertaking to live a holy and virtuous life, in obedience to God's commands, and in expectation of his rewards. And it answers to another phrase of the like import, walking with God; which signifies continuing and persevering in that religious practice, whereof coming to God is the beginning or entrance. Thus (Gen. v. 22.) *Enoch walked with God*; and, (vi. 9.) *Noah was a just man, and perfect in his generation, and Noah walked with God*. Walking with God, is being perfect or steadfast in that religious course of life, whereof coming to God, is making the first profession. He that cometh to God, is as much as to say, whosoever will be a virtuous or religious man: In like manner, as, he that cometh to Christ, signifies more particularly, he that will take upon

him to be a Christian. *No man can come to me*, says our Saviour, (Joh. vi. 44.) (that is, he cannot become a good Christian) *except the Father which hath sent me, draw him;—every man that hath learned of the Father, cometh unto me*. The phrase, *except the Father draw him*, is, in our present manner of speaking, difficult and unusual; but it is explained by what follows, *he that hath learned of the Father*. The meaning is: No man can effectually believe in Christ, except he first believes in God. Natural religion is the best preparative for the reception of the Christian. The love of truth and virtue in general, is the dispensation of the Father; and the doctrine of the gospel in particular, is the dispensation of the Son. Now as no man can receive Christ, who has not first heard, and is thus drawn by the Father; as no one can be a good Christian, who is not first resolved to be a good man; so no one can hear the father, can come to God, unless he first have faith, and believes in him. The dispensation of the Father, that of creation or natural religion, is a necessary preparative for the dispensation of the Son, that is, for the gospel: And it must itself have preparation made for it by faith going before, as by the first foundation of all. *He that cometh to God, must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him*.

The sense therefore of the text is this.

It is in vain to make profession of religion, without being first well instructed and firmly persuaded of this foundation; the being and attributes of God. There is no Christian, who is not well apprized of this; and may be apt to think perhaps, that it is needless to remind him of it. But there are few who consider these first principles of religion, so seriously and so frequently as they ought to do; and in such a manner, as to cause them to produce their proper effect, by influencing their whole lives and conversations. For knowledge is but a dormant habit, if not excited by constant meditation! and powers are of no use, if not produced into act. Right notions of the being and attributes of God, every one knows, are the foundation of all religion: But then this knowledge must not be a bare speculation; but a serious, practical, affecting impression, and deep sense upon the mind, of a supreme being, who created the world by his

his power, preserves and governs it by his goodness and wisdom, and will judge is with justice, mercy, and truth: Of such a supreme being; whose glory, no eye can behold; whose majesty, no thought can comprehend; whose power, no strength can resist; from whose presence, no swiftness can flee; from whose knowledge, no secret can be concealed; whose justice, no art can evade; whose goodness, every creature partakes of. This is that *faith*, without which it is *impossible to please God*. It is impossible to please him without it; not that virtue and righteousness, if it were possible to find them without *faith*, could be in themselves unacceptable to God; but that, because without such *faith* there can be no righteousness, therefore neither without it can God possibly be pleased. Righteousness is the only means, by which rational beings can obtain the favour of God; and therefore since *faith* is necessary in order to righteousness, it is consequently necessary to the obtaining of the favour of God. He that will please God, must come to him in the ways of virtue and true holiness; and he that *cometh to God, must first believe that he is*.

From what has been said upon this head, we may easily dissipate the vain fears of many pious and sincere persons, who are very apt to be suspicious of themselves that they want true *faith*, and consequently that their religion is vain. Now this fear, in such persons, evidently arises from want of having a distinct notion what *faith* is. They are possessed of the thing; but for want of clearly understanding the notion, they are not able to judge rightly whether they have it or not. From the explication which has now been given of that matter, men may easily examine themselves, whether they have that *faith* which I have been describing, or no. And without entering into the definition at all, there is yet a plainer rule given us by our Saviour; *by its fruits we may know it*. Wherever the fruits of righteousness and true virtue are found, there cannot be wanting the root of faith, from which those fruits proceed: For he that cometh to God, does certainly believe that he is; and gives the best proof in the world that he does so. On the contrary, whosoever upon examination finds not in his life the fruits of righteousness; whatsoever his speculative understanding may be, yet in the Christian sense he may be sure he has

no *faith*. For if the spring, the cause, the active principle were present; there would not be wanting its proper effect. Such as the root is, such will be the branches. He who seriously believes that God is; will endeavour to come unto him, in the ways of truth and righteousness.

Having thus briefly explained the former part of the words; and shewn both what *faith* is, and how absolutely necessary; as without which it is *impossible to please God*, or to come unto him; it remains that I consider, in the latter part of the words, those two fundamental instances or primary objects of faith, laid before us by the apostle; namely, the being of God, and his relation to us; *that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him*. The first foundation of all, and the primary object of faith, is the being of God; *he that cometh to God, must believe that he is*. Now the grounds or arguments, upon which our faith in this particular is built; besides the evidence and authority of revelation; are, from reason itself, and from the very nature of things, many and various: there being hardly any thing in nature, from whence the certainty of the being of God, may not justly and reasonably be deduced. Some of the arguments are abstruse, and require attention; but, when thoroughly considered, conclude most strongly to the conviction of obstinate unbelievers. Others are plain, easy, and obvious, suited to all capacities; always ready at hand to confirm the faith even of the meanest understandings; and yet differing from the former, not in strength, but in being more common only. It would be tedious to repeat at length upon this head a great number of arguments among Christians to whom they have been so often urged, and are so well understood. But by a brief recapitulation, to remind ourselves frequently of things already known, for the better assisting of our meditations, cannot but in many cases be very useful. *For me, saith St. Paul, to repeat unto you the same things, is not grievous, and for you it is safe*. To this purpose, the numerous arguments, which prove (in particular) the being of God, may be naturally reduced to the two which follow.

First, That it is evident, both we ourselves, and all the other beings we know in the world, are weak and dependent creatures; which neither gave ourselves being

being, nor can preserve it by any power of our own: And that therefore we entirely owe our being to some superior and more powerful cause; which superior cause either must be itself the first cause, which is the notion of God; or else, by the same argument as before, must derive from him, and so lead us to the knowledge of him. If it be said, that we received our being from our forefathers by a continued natural succession, (which however would not in any step have been possible, without a perpetual providence,) yet still the argument holds no less strong concerning the first of the whole race; that he could not but be made by a superior intelligent cause. If an atheist, contrary to the truth of all history, shall contend that there may have been, without any beginning at all, an eternal succession of men: yet still it will be no less evident, that such a perpetual succession could not have been without an eternal superior cause; because in the nature of things themselves there is manifestly no necessity, that any such succession of transient beings, either temporary or perpetual, should have existed at all.

Secondly, The other argument, to which the greatest part of the proofs of the being of God may briefly be reduced, is the order and beauty of the world; that exquisite harmony of nature, by which (as St. Paul expresses it, Rom. i. 20.) *the invisible things of God from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made.* And this argument, as it is infinitely strong to the most accurate philosophers, so it is also sufficiently obvious even to the meanest capacities. Whose power was it (Psal. civ. 2.), that framed this beautiful and stately fabric, this immense and spacious world? *that stretched out the North over the empty place, and hanged the earth upon nothing?* (Job, xxvi. 7.). That formed those vast and numberless orbs of heaven (Psal. xix. 1.), and disposed them into such regular and uniform motions (Psal. cxlvii. 4.)? that appointed the sun to rule the day, and the Moon and the stars to govern the night? (Psal. civ. 19.) that so adjusted their several distances, as that they should neither be scorched by heat, nor destroyed by cold? that encompassed the earth with air so wonderfully contrived, as at one and the same time to support clouds for rain, to afford winds for health and traffic, to be proper for the breath of ani-

mals by its spring, for causing sounds by its motion, for transmitting light by its transparency? that fitted the water to afford vapours for rain, speed for traffic, and fish for nourishment and delicacy? that weighed the mountains in scales, and the hills in a balance; and adjusted them in their most proper places for fruitfulness and health? that diversified the climates of the earth into such an agreeable variety, that in that great difference, yet each one has its proper seasons, day and night, winter and summer? that clothed the face of the earth with plants and flowers, so exquisitely adorned with various and inimitable beauties, that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of them? that replenished the world with animals, so different from each other in particular, and yet all in the whole so much alike? that framed with exquisite workmanship the eye for seeing, and other parts of the body necessarily in proportion, without which no creature could have long subsisted? that, beyond all these things, endued the soul of man with far superior faculties; with understanding, judgment, reason, and will; with faculties whereby in a most exalted manner *God teaches us more than the beasts of the field, and maketh us wiser than the fowls of heaven* (Job, xxxv. 11.)?

It is commonly alleged by unbelievers, that all these things are done by second causes. And suppose they were, (which however is not universally true: But suppose they were effected by second causes,) yet how would that diminish the necessity of acknowledging the first cause? If among men, many things are performed by the use of instruments; are those things therefore ever the less justly ascribed to the hands which used the instruments? Because every wheel in a watch moves only naturally, according to the frame of its parts, and the strength which the spring impresses upon it; is therefore the skill of the workman the less to be acknowledged, who adjusted those very things? Or because it is natural for the wheels of a watch, or for the rooms of a house, to be of such particular shapes and dimensions, does this make it possible, that therefore they may have been formed so without any artificer? All natural, all second causes, are nothing else, but either the inanimate motions of senseless matter, or the voluntary motions of dependent creatures. And what are these, but one of

of them the direct operation; and the other, only the free permission, of Him who ruleth over all? Men's neglecting therefore to infer the being of God, from every thing they see or think of every day, is in reality as great a stupidity as if from the constant and regular continuance of the day-light, men should cease to observe, that there is such a thing as the sun in the heavens, from whence that light proceeds. Nor would it be more absurd to imagine, that the light would continue, though the sun, which causes it, were extinguished; than that the effects of nature can regularly go on, without the being of God who causes those effects. To evade this argument there is no other possible way, but to affirm either that all things were produced by chance, or that they are all eternal necessarily of themselves. As to chance, it is evident that is nothing but a mere word, or an abstract notion in our manner of conceiving things. It has itself no real being; it is nothing, and can do nothing. Besides, in the works of God, the further men search, and the more discoveries they make, the greater exactness they constantly find; whereas in things done either by the art of man, or by what we call chance, the contrary always is true; the more they are understood, the less accurate they appear. Beyond all credulity therefore is the credulousness of atheists, whose belief is so absurdly strong, as to believe that chance could make the world, when it cannot build a house; that chance should produce all plants, when it cannot paint one landscape; that chance should form all animals, when it cannot so much as make a lifeless watch. On the other hand therefore, if they will affirm that all things are eternal; yet still the argument holds as strong as before, that things which cannot for any time exist without a cause, can much less without a cause exist through all time. Unless they will affirm, that all things exist by an internal absolute necessity in their own nature. Which that they do not, is evident from hence; that there exists in the world an infinite diversity of things, whereas necessity is uniform and without variation.

Having thus briefly shewn that God is; it will easily follow in the next place, that he is and must be *a rewarder of them that diligently seek him*. For he that governs the motions of every even the smallest particle of lifeless matter, and by whose pro-

vidence every vegetable and every the meanest animal is perpetually preserved; without whom, not a sparrow falls to the ground; and with whom, even the very hairs of our head are all numbered; shall he not much more take care of us, O we of little faith? Now the proper and principal care or government over rational creatures, is the rewarding or punishing them according to their respective deserts. If therefore God is, (as hath before been proved,) and is governor of the world; it follows that he must be also, (since therein principally all government consists; he must be) *a rewarder of them that diligently seek him*.

The application of what has been said, is briefly; 1st, to sceptics; and 2dly, to believers.

1st, To such as are sceptics or unbelievers of the being of God, it is advisable in the first place, that they consider how uncomfortable their opinion is. It is plain, such is the condition of human nature in this life, that we are continually surrounded with evils which we cannot prevent, with wants which we are not able to supply, with infirmities which we cannot remove, with dangers which we can no way escape. Our enjoyments are such, as are not for one moment secure; our expectations, of such things as are not in our own power to accomplish. We are apt to grieve, for things we cannot help; and to be tormented with fears, of what we cannot prevent. And in all these cases, there is no substantial comfort, but in the belief of God; and in the singular satisfaction of having Him our friend. Had the thing therefore really in itself any uncertainty, (which is by no means the case,) yet it could not but be what every wise and reasonable man must desire and wish might be true, that the world were governed by a wise and just and merciful God. So that even sceptics themselves cannot but be self-condemned, when they mock and scoff at religion; when they refuse to hear arguments for the truth of the most desirable thing in the world; and will not examine those evidences and proofs of religion, which are really much stronger than these persons can beforehand imagine. And if the proofs were much weaker than they are, yet they would deserve at least to seriously considered; because the hazard on one side is infinitely great, if religion, which they reject, be true; whereas on the other side there

there is no hazard at all, if, being received as true, it could possibly prove to be a mistake.

2dly, To sincere believers, the use of what has been said, is; that being once satisfied in the *main and great* truths of religion, they suffer not themselves to be moved, and their faith in this *great* point, shaken, by nice and uncertain disputes about particular questions of less moment. For, which way soever many such controversies of an abstruse and difficult nature, be determined; yet the great foundation of religion, upon which a wise man may always act steadily, is laid deep and sure in this plain proposition, that *God is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.*

S E R M O N III.

By BISHOP PORTEUS.

On the Causes of Unbelief.

JOHN iii. 19.

This is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.

WHEN the several parts of the text are reduced to their proper order; they give us the four following distinct propositions.

That light is come into the world.

That men have preferred darkness to this light.

That the reason is, because their deeds are evil.

And that the consequence of this choice will be condemnation.

It may be worth our while to bestow a little consideration on each of these particulars.

In this enlightened age, it will be thought no paradox to assert that *light is come into the world.* The position is true in more senses than one; but there is only one that can suit this passage. The light here meant can be no other than that divine one of revelation, which *brought life and immortality* (2 Tim. i. 10.) along with it. The Christian dispensation is constantly and uniformly described in holy writ under this figure, from the time that the first faint glimmerings of it appeared at a distance, till it shone forth

in its full lustre and glory under the gospel. Indeed there seems to be scarce any other image, that could so fitly and adequately represent it to us. It is of the same use to the spiritual, that the light of the sun is to the natural, world. It gives life, health, and vigour, to God's new creation; it makes the *day of salvation* (2 Cor. vi. 2.) to dawn upon us; it opens to us the prospect of another and a better life; *it is a light to our feet, and a lantern to our paths* (Psal. cxix. 105.), and guides us in the way to happiness and glory.

The next assertion contained in the text, that *men have preferred darkness to this light*, may seem to require a proof. To love darkness rather than light is so opposite to our nature, so inconsistent with our general manner of proceeding, that it seems at first incredible. If it really is the case, so perverse a choice was never made but in religion. Every other kind of light men catch at with the utmost eagerness. The light of the heavens has been ever esteemed one of the greatest blessings that Providence has bestowed upon us, without which, even life itself would be hardly thought worth possessing. The love of knowledge, that light of the mind, appears in us as early, and operates in us as strongly, as any one principle in our nature; and in every instance, the human understanding naturally lays hold on every opportunity of information, and opens itself on every side to let in all the light it is capable of receiving.

How then comes it to pass, that with a mind thus constituted, thus thirsting after light, men can sometimes bring themselves to do such violence to their nature, as to chuse darkness, in that very point where it is of the utmost importance to have all the light they can possibly get; where every step must lead to happiness or misery, and every error draw after it the most fatal and lasting consequences? Yet our Saviour tells us, that this was actually the case in his days, and would to God that daily experience did not show the possibility of it, in our own! But when we see the various artifices with which revelation is every day assailed; when we see one man most ingeniously reasoning us out of every ground of certainty, and every criterion of truth; involving self-evident axioms in obscurity and confusion; and entangling our understandings

in the gloomy intricacies of scholastic subtilty and metaphysical abstraction : when we see another exhausting all the powers of a most fertile genius, in ridiculing the dispensations of the God that gave it ; making the most awful subjects of religion the constant sport of his licentious wit ; and continuing to sit with unabated levity in *the seat of the scorner*, even on the very brink of the grave : when we see a third, with the strongest professions of sincerity and good faith, proposing most humbly what he calls his doubts and scruples, and thereby creating them in the minds of others ; extolling one part of Christianity in order to subvert the rest ; retaining its moral precepts, but rejecting its miracles and all its characteristic doctrines ; giving an air of speciousness to the wildest singularities, by the most exquisite graces of composition, and insidiously undermining the foundations of the Gospel, while he pretends to defend it : when I say our adversaries assume such different shapes, and set so many engines at work against us ; what else can this mean but to take from us all the sources of religious information, and bring us back again to the darkness and ignorance of our Pagan ancestors ? It is to no purpose to tell us here of the light of nature. It is an affront to our senses, to offer us that dim taper, in the room of the *sun of righteousness*. (Mal. iv. 2.) Whatever may be said (and a great deal has been said) of the modern improvements of science, the discoveries of philosophy, and the sagacity of human reason, it is to Revelation only we are indebted for the superior light we now boast of in religion. If nature could ever have pointed out to us right principles of belief, and rules of conduct, she might have done it long ago ; she had four thousand years to do it in before the coming of Christ. But what little progress was made in this vast space of time ; what egregious mistakes were committed, not only in the speculative doctrines of religion, but in some of the most essential points of practical morality, I need not remind you. How comes it then to pass, that this blind guide is at last become so quick-sighted ? How comes her eye on a sudden so strong and clear, as to see into the perfections and will of God, to penetrate into the dark regions of futurity, to take in at one view the whole compass of our duty, and the whole extent of our ex-

istence ? It is plain some friendly hand must have removed the film from her eyes ; and what other hand could this be than that gracious beneficent one, which gave eyes to the blind, and feet to the lame ; which helped the impotence, and healed the infirmity, of nature, in every instance, in none more than in this ? It is in short from the sacred sources of the Gospel, that reason drew that light she now enjoys. Let then men walk, if they will be so perverse, *by this lesser light* (Gen. i. 16.), which was only intended *to rule the night* (ib.) of heathenism ; but let them be so honest as to confess that it is only a borrowed, a reflected light ; that it owes much the greatest part of its present lustre to that greater, that better light of the Gospel, whose province it is *to govern the day* (Gen. i. 16.), and *to lighten every man that cometh into the world*. (John i. 9).

Let us however suppose for a moment (what can never be proved) that mankind are now much better able to investigate truth, and to find out their duty by themselves, than they were in former ages ; and that reason can give us (the utmost it ever did or can pretend to give) a perfect system of morality. But what will this avail us, unless it could be shewn that man is also perfect and uncorrupt ? A religion that contained nothing more than a perfect system of morality, might perhaps suit an angel ; but it is only one part, it is only a subordinate part, of the religion of a man and a sinner. It would be but very poor consolation to a criminal going to execution, to put into his hands a complete collection of the laws of his country, when the poor wretch perhaps expected a reprieve. It could serve no other purpose than to embitter his agonies, and make him see more clearly the justice of his condemnation. If you chuse to do the unhappy man a real service, and to give him any substantial comfort, you must assure him that the offence for which he was going to die was forgiven him ; that his sentence was reversed ; that he would not only be restored to his prince's favour, but put in a way of preserving it for the future ; and that if his conduct afterwards was honest and upright, he should be deemed capable of enjoying the highest honours in his master's kingdom. But no one could tell him this, or at least he would credit no one that did ; except he was commissioned and authorized by the prince

prince himself, to tell him so. He might study the laws in his hands till the very moment of his execution, without ever finding out from them that he should obtain a pardon.

Such, the scriptures inform us, was the state of man before Christ came into the world. He had fallen from his original innocence. He was a rebel against God, and obnoxious to his wrath. The sentence of death had passed upon him, and he had no plea to offer to arrest the execution of it. Reason, you say, gives him a perfect rule to walk by. But he has already transgressed this rule; and if even this transgression were cancelled, yet, if left to himself, he may transgress it again the next moment. He is uneasy under his sentence, he wants forgiveness for the past, assistance for the future; and till you can give him this, it is an insult upon his misery to talk to him of a perfect rule of action. If this be all that reason can give him (and it is really much more than it can give him) he must necessarily have recourse to Revelation. God only knows, and God only can tell, whether he will forgive, and upon what terms he will forgive the offences done against him; what mode of worship he requires; what helps he will afford us; and what condition he will place us in hereafter. All this God actually has told us in the Gospel. It was to tell us this, He sent his Son into the world, whose mission was confirmed by the highest authority, by signs from Heaven, and miracles on earth; whose life and doctrine are delivered down to us by the most unexceptionable witnesses, who sealed their testimony with their blood; who were too curious and incredulous to be themselves imposed upon, too honest and sincere, too plain and artless, to impose upon others.

What then can be the reason that men still refuse to see, and persist in *loving darkness rather than light*? They will tell you perhaps, that it is because the Gospel is full of incredible mysteries; but our Saviour tells you, and he tells you much truer, that it is *because their deeds are evil*. The mysteries and difficulties of the Gospel can be no real objection to any man that considers what mysteries occur, and what insuperable objections may be started, in almost every branch of human knowledge; and how often we are obliged, in our most important temporal concerns, to decide

and to act upon evidence, incumbered with far greater difficulties than any that are to be found in scripture. If we can admit no religion that is not free from mystery, we must, I doubt, be content without any religion at all. Even the religion of nature itself, the whole constitution both of the natural and the moral world, is full of mystery; and the greatest mystery of all would be, if, with so many irresistible marks of truth, Christianity should at last prove false. It is not then because the Gospel has too little light for these men that they reject it, but because it has too much. *For every one that doth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reprov'd.* (John iii. 20.) The light of the Gospel is too prying and inquisitive for such an one. It reveals certain things which he could wish to conceal from all the world, and if possible from himself. Nor is this all; it not only reveals, but it reproveth them. It strikes him with an evidence he cannot bear; an evidence not only of its own truth, but of his unworthy conduct. The Gospel does indeed offend him; but it is not his understanding, it is his conscience, that is shocked; he could easily credit what it requires him to believe; but he cannot, or rather he will not, practise what it commands him to do.

It is plain that such a man cannot possibly admit a Revelation that condemns him; and it is as plain that the man of virtue cannot spurn the hand that is graciously stretched out to reward him. If he is a truly virtuous man, that is, one who sincerely labours to know his duty, and sincerely intends to perform it, he cannot but wish for more light to guide him in the investigation, more assistance to support him in the discharge of it, more happiness to crown his perseverance in it, than bare reason alone can afford him. This is what all the best and wisest Heathens most ardently desired, what nature has been continually looking out for with the utmost earnestness of expectation. When with a mind thus disposed he sits down to examine the Gospel, suggest to me the least shadow of a reason why he should reject it. He finds in it a religion, pure, holy, and benevolent, as the God that gave it. He finds not only its moral precepts, but even its sublimest mysteries, calculated to promote internal sanctity, vital piety, universal philanthropy. He finds it through-

out so great and noble, so congenial to the finest feelings, and most generous sentiments of his soul; that he cannot but wish it may be true; and never yet, I believe, did any good man wish it to be true, but he actually found it so. He sees in it every expectation of nature answered, every infirmity supported, every want supplied, every terror dissipated, every hope confirmed; nay, he sees that God has done exceeding abundantly above all that he could either ask or think; that he has given him (what reason could hardly have the idea of) eternal happiness in a life to come. Will this man *love darkness rather than that light*? Will he chuse to pursue virtue with much pains, little success, and no other wages than death; or to be led to her through a safe and easy path by an infallible guide, who does not desire him to *serve God for nought*?

Let me not however be understood to assert, or to represent the text as asserting, that all unbelievers are without exception absolutely wicked men. There are some, no doubt, who lead, what is called, good moral lives. Yet, if you examine even these very strictly, you will, I believe, seldom find that their virtue is so pure, so uniform, so extensive, so complete in all the several branches of duty, as that of a truly devout Christian. And it should be observed also, that men may reject the Gospel, not only because they are dissolute in their conduct, but for various other reasons: because, perhaps, they are too busy, or too idle, to examine carefully into the truth; because, like Gallio, *they care for none of these things*, and like him, *drive them away with contempt from the judgment seat* (Acts xviii. 16.) of their own mind; because they give themselves up to a warm lively imagination; and are impatient to shew that they have more depth of thought, more freedom of spirit, and elevation of mind, than the rest of the world; because, in fine, they are ambitious to figure at the head of a sect, to enjoy the delightful triumph of beating down long-established opinions, and erecting upon their ruins a little favourite system of their own. Now all these causes of infidelity, though less culpable than downright profligacy, are yet evidently great faults, and indicate more or less a depraved turn of mind; and from immoralities of this kind at least scarce any sceptics are entirely free. Or,

admit that some are; yet these instances are confessedly very rare; and a prudent man would no more chuse to embark his morality on so precarious a bottom, than he would venture to walk in the dark amidst rocks and precipices, because some perhaps have done it without receiving any harm. In general, therefore, the ground of unbelief laid down by our Saviour in the text, is undoubtedly a true one; and if a man shuns the light, it is an almost certain sign that his deeds are, in some sense or other, in a greater or a less degree, evil, and consequently his condemnation just.

Yet how can this be, you will perhaps say? Can God punish his creatures for walking by that light which he himself has set up in their own minds, though he has at the same time perhaps revealed a fuller light from Heaven? Most certainly he can; for the very same reason that a prince might punish his subjects for acting by the law of nature; instead of governing themselves by the civil laws of the land. It is not a matter of indifference, whether you embrace Christianity or not. Though reason could answer all the purposes of Revelation, (which is far, very far from being the case), yet you are not at liberty to make it your sole guide, if there be such a thing as a true Revelation. We are the subjects of the Almighty: and whether we will acknowledge it or not, we live, and cannot but live, under his government. His will is the law of his kingdom. If he has made no express declaration of his will, we must collect it as well as we can from what we know of his nature and our own. But if he has expressly declared his will, that is the law we are to be governed by. We may indeed refuse to be governed by it; but it is at our peril if we do; for if it proves to be a true declaration of his will, to reject it is rebellion.

But to reject or receive it, you may allege, is not a thing in your own power. Belief depends not on your will, but your understanding. And will the righteous judge of the earth condemn you for want of understanding? No; but he may and will condemn you for the wrong conduct of your understanding. It is not indeed in your power to believe whatever you please, whether credible or incredible; but it is in your power to consider thoroughly, whether a supposed incredibility be

be real or only apparent. It is in your power to bestow a greater or less degree of attention on the evidence before you. It is in your power to examine it with an earnest desire to find out the truth, and a firm resolution to embrace it wherever you do find it; or on the contrary, to bring with you a heart full of incorrigible depravity, or invincible prepossessions. Have you then truly and honestly done every thing that is confessedly in your power, towards forming a right judgement of revelation? Have you ever laid before yourself in one view the whole collective evidence of Christianity: the consistence, harmony, and connection, of all its various parts; the long chain of prophecies undeniably compleated in it; the astonishing and well-attested miracles that attended it; the perfect sanctity of its author; the purity of its precepts; the sublimity of its doctrines; the amazing rapidity of its progress; the illustrious company of confessors, saints, and martyrs, who died to confirm its truth; together with an infinite number of collateral proofs and subordinate circumstances, all concurring to form such a body of evidence, as no other truth in the world can shew; such as must necessarily bear down, by its own weight and magnitude, all trivial objections to particular parts? Surely these things are not trifles; surely they at least demand seriousness and attention. Have you then done the Gospel this common piece of justice? Have you ever sat down to consider it with impartiality and candour; without any favourite vice or early prejudice, without any fondness for applause, or novelty, or refinement, to mislead you? Have you examined it with the same care and diligence that you would examine a title to an estate? Have you enquired for proper books? Have you read the defences of revelation as well as the attacks upon it? Have you in difficult points applied for the opinion of wise and learned friends; just as you would consult the ablest lawyers when your property was concerned, or the most skilful physicians when your life was at stake? If you can truly say, that you have done all these things; if you have faithfully bestowed on these enquiries, all the leisure and abilities you are master of, and called in every help within your reach, there is little danger of any material doubts re-

maining upon your mind. But if after all there should, be not afraid; trust in God and be at peace; *if your own heart condemn you not, then may you have confidence towards God.* (1 John iii. 21.) You are in the hands of a gracious Master, who will not require more of you than you are able to perform. To the modest, the humble, the diligent, the virtuous enquirer; who labours after conviction, but cannot thoroughly arrive at it; who never attempts or wishes to infuse his scruples into others; who earnestly strives, who fervently prays, for more light and strength; crying out with all the passionate sincerity of an honest heart, *Lord, I believe, help thou mine unbelief,* (Mark ix. 24.); to him every equitable allowance will undoubtedly be made, every instance of compassionate tenderness be shown. *For like as a father pitieth his own children, even so is the Lord merciful to them that fear him.* (Ps. ciii. 31.) But to them who neither fear nor regard him; to the bold unbelieving libertine, who is against the gospel, because the gospel is against him; to the man of pride and paradox, who burns to distinguish himself from the vulgar by the novelty of his opinions, and would disdain to follow the common herd of mankind, even though he knew they were leading him to heaven; to the subtle minute philosopher, who refines away every dictate of common sense, and is lost in the dark profound of his own wretched sophistry; to the buffoon, who laughs and takes pains to make all the world laugh at every thing serious and sacred; to the indolent, negligent, superficial, free-thinker, who reads a little, takes for granted a great deal, and understands nothing thoroughly; to the man of pleasure and amusement, who treats all these things with a giddy, wanton, contemptuous, levity; and thinks that the whole fabric of revelation may be overturned, by a silly cavil, or a profane jest, thrown out in the gay moments of convivial mirth: to these I say, and all like these, the Almighty will one day most assuredly show, that his gracious offers of salvation are not to be despised, and trampled upon, and ridiculed with impunity.

Consider then, you, who reject the Gospel (if any such be here), consider, I entreat you, on what grounds you reject it; and think a little seriously on these

things once more in your lives, before you resolve never to think again. Look well into your own hearts and see whether you are really, what perhaps you profess to be, unbelievers on conviction, or whether you have taken up your infidelity, as some do their faith, upon trust. It becomes not *us* to judge you uncharitably; but indeed it becomes *you* to examine yourselves very strictly. You may easily deceive the world; you may, if you please, deceive yourselves; but God you cannot deceive. He, to whom all hearts are open as the day, he knows whether you are conscientious and honest doubters, or careless, prejudiced, profane despisers, of his word. *It is a small thing for you to be judged of man's judgement; he that judgeth you is the Lord,* (1 Cor. iv. 3, 4.); and by the unerring rules of his justice you must finally stand or fall. Think then whether you can face that justice without dismay; whether you can boldly plead before the tribunal of Christ the sincerity of your unbelief as a bar to your condemnation. That plea may possibly in some cases be a good one. God grant it may in yours! But remember this one thing; that you stake your own souls upon the truth of it.

SERMON IV.

By ARCHBISHOP SECKER,

On Religious Mystery.

DEUT. XXIX. 29,

The secret things belong unto the Lord our God: but those things, which are revealed, belong unto us and to our children for ever; that we may do all the words of this law.

IT is one material consideration, amongst many, in favour of the Jewish and Christian Scriptures, that they preserve throughout so due a medium in the discoveries, which they make, of Divine truths, as to direct the faith and practice of men without indulging their curiosity. The writings of enthusiasts would have course have been overrun with mysteries; and much fuller of explanations, that would make them still more obscure, than of the plain doctrines of piety and morals.

Impostors would never have neglected to recommend themselves by doing us so singular a pleasure, as that of letting us into all the arcana of heaven. Both would have entertained us, as they very safely might, with long and astonishing accounts of the essence of God, the orders and employments of invisible beings, of the counsels of Providence in the government both of them and us, of the particulars in which the future happiness and misery of man will consist. Now on the contrary, of these matters holy writ gives no other than brief, imperfect, general notices: and those merely in subservience to the far less agreeable subjects, of our duties to God, each other, and ourselves.

Thus it delivers predictions of future events: not for the vain amusement of the inquisitive: but partly for direction, warning, or encouragement to particular nations and ages: partly to establish the truth of revelation, in all nations and ages, by their accomplishment. It contains also supernatural doctrines: but such only as make the ground-work, more or less, of our obligations, or our hopes. These it was evidently requisite for us to know: and accordingly they are notified to us: but without any art used to render the strangest of them plausible, or any care taken to gratify us with full information about them, or to shew us why it is withheld. The articles of belief are laid down with the utmost simplicity: our assent to them is required on the testimony of God: and when once we have been told enough to regulate our practice, we are only told farther, that *faith without works is dead.* (James ii. 20.) A grievous disappointment to our wishes undoubtedly: but still our reason must allow, that this is the proper conduct of the Lord of all to his creatures; and we find it to be his perpetual conduct from the beginning of the Bible to the end. What our corresponding duty is, we are taught in several places; but no where so distinctly and fully, as in the text: which conveys as necessary instruction, to this day, as it did originally, though relating in part to different points. And happy would men always have been made, and happy might they become yet, by the observance of its rules. These are

I. That we should never pry into mat-
ters,

ters, which infinite Wisdom hath concealed. For *the secret things belong unto the Lord our God.*

II. That we should receive with attentive humility whatever it communicates. For *those things which are revealed, belong to us and to our children for ever.*

III. That we should allow every divine truth its due influence on our behaviour. For we are to learn them, *that we may do all the words of this law.*

These are the maxims, which ought to be established in our minds, before we examine into any particular doctrine: and the previous thought, how particular doctrines will be affected by them, ought to be avoided as far as is possible. They should be explained without partiality, embraced without jealousy, and their genuine consequences admitted, whatever they may prove to be.

I. That we should never pry into matters, which infinite Wisdom hath concealed. For we shall seldom, if at all, be wiser for such inquiries: we shall never be happier or better: and we shall usually be more wretched and less innocent.

In what reason or experience discovers to us, farther speculations or trials may produce new discoveries. But of articles depending on mere revelation, as we could have discerned nothing without it, we shall be able to discern very little, if any thing beyond it. In the shortest and seemingly most obvious consequences, drawn concerning subjects, that lie naturally out of our reach, we must be exceedingly liable to mistakes: and venturing far into the dark, is the sure way to stumble. Another state may probably withdraw the veil, and acquaint us clearly and familiarly with what now perplexes our reasonings, and wearies our conjectures. Let us wait then contentedly for the time, which of necessity we must wait for: and apply to ourselves the comfort, which our Saviour gave St. Peter on a different occasion, *What I do thou knowest not now; but thou shalt know hereafter.* (John xiii. 7.) Yet even then, truths will remain, the full comprehension of which must for ever be impossible, not only to us, but to the highest creatures of that almighty Being, one of whose distinctions, inculcated in Scripture, is, *God only wise.* (Rom. xvi. 27. 1 Tim. i. 17. Jude 25.) His nature

and attributes being unlimited, his works and providence reaching through immensity and eternity, the greatest advances of finite beings, must be infinitely distant from a complete understanding of them. *Canst thou by searching find out God? Canst thou find out the Almighty unto perfection? It is high as heaven: what canst thou do? deeper than hell: what canst thou know? The measure thereof is longer than the earth, and broader than the sea.* (Job xi. 7, 8, 9.)

But could inquiry add more to our knowledge, than it can: would it increase our happiness? We meet with difficulties, and should be glad of solutions: we enter a little way into a subject; see that vastly more lies behind, and earnestly long to be masters of it. But if we were so, are we at all sure, whether fresh doubts and questions, more embarrassing perhaps than the present, might not immediately arise from thence? We find it so in the visible world, where we had less ground to expect it. New facts are daily observed, new properties of bodies discovered, new deductions made from them: and what is the consequence? Why, that the scheme of things appears deeper and less fathomable, for every step we take in hopes of getting to the bottom of it. In all likelihood therefore the same is the case of the spiritual world too: and, by knowing more of it, we should be farther from being satisfied than ever, if our satisfaction depends on knowing all. The system of religion is fully taught us by common reason, and the plain parts of Scripture. The defence of it is conducted most prudently by owning our ignorance, where we are ignorant, which gives no advantages; whereas affectation of the contrary gives many. The practice of it consists, not in filling our heads with unnecessary speculations, but applying our hearts to necessary duties. The rewards of it are annexed to believing and doing what is required of us: and how can we be the better then for aiming at more?

Indeed we shall scarcely avoid being much the worse. By engaging in matters, of which we are unqualified to judge, we shall be in danger of judging materially wrong; either mistaking the nature, or even denying the truth of religion, like those of old, who, *professing themselves to be wise, became fools.* (Rom. i. 22.)

i. 22.) And the errors, into which we may thus fall, will be the less excusable, as they will proceed from our own rashness. Besides, the more intent persons are on pursuing their theories, the less time, and usually the less concern, they will have for performing their obligations: excepting, it may be, some fanciful ones, which they have built on their imagined discoveries: resembling those worshippers of angels, whom St. Paul charges with intruding into things, which they had not seen, being vainly puffed up by their fleshly minds. (Col. ii. 18.) Superfluous inquisitiveness is indeed sometimes accompanied with excessive diffidence: and then, though less criminal, it produces most tormenting anxieties. But commonly it proceeds from a degree of that irreverent vanity, which possessed our parent Eve, and cost mankind so dear, of invading such knowledge, as God hath reserved to himself, instead of acquiescing cheerfully in so much as he hath imparted.

Then with this undutiful spirit easily associates itself a still more mischievous one, of uncharitableness and spiritual tyranny. For when once men are assuming enough to determine, out of their own inventions, things, which their Maker hath not determined, the next natural step is, to contend for them far more earnestly, than for the faith once delivered to the saints, (Jude 3.): casting off Christian love, refusing communion or toleration, and too often renouncing common humanity, to all who differ from them. And therefore the Apostle gives Timothy, at the same time, these two directions: *Follow righteousness, charity, peace, with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart. But foolish and unlearned questions* (and nothing is more unlearned, than disputing in the dark) *avoid; knowing that they do gender strifes.* (2 Tim. ii. 22, 23.)

On all accounts then we should keep close to plain reason and plain scripture: let our assent be determinate, as far as they are undeniably so; but make no decision concerning what is doubtful, invent no groundless hypothesis to clear up what is obscure, nor carry on too long chains of argument from what seems the most evident. I conclude this head with that excellent advice of the son of Sirach. *Seek not out the things that are too hard for thee, neither search the things that are above*

thy strength. But what is commanded thee, think thereupon with reverence: for it is not needful for thee to see with thine eyes the things which are in secret. Be not curious in unnecessary matters: for more things are shewed unto thee, than men understand. Many are deceived by their own vain opinion: and an evil suspicion hath overthrown their judgement. Without eyes thou shalt want light: profess not therefore the knowledge that thou hast not. (Ecclus. iii. 21—25.)

II. The next rule, which Moses gives, is, that we should receive, with attentive humility, whatever infinite wisdom communicates to us. *For those things, which are revealed, belong to us and to our children for ever.*

Indeed let any proposition be delivered to us, as coming from God or from man, we can believe it no farther than we understand it: and therefore if we do not understand it at all, we cannot believe it at all; I mean, explicitly: but only be persuaded, that it contains some truth or other, though we know not what. Again, were any doctrine laid down, which we clearly saw to be self-contradictory, or otherwise absurd, that could never be an object of our faith. For there is no possibility of admitting, upon any authority, a thing for true, which we evidently perceive to be false. Nor would calling such doctrines mysterious mend the matter in the least. For indeed there is no mystery in them: they are as plain, as any in nature; as plainly contrary to truth, as any thing else is agreeable to it.

But if our assent be required to a proposition, which hath some meaning and no inconsistency in it, and is undeniably asserted in a revelation well proved: but only we have no other evidence for it; nor should of ourselves ever have imagined any such thing, indeed should have thought it very unlikely; and still cannot thoroughly comprehend it; or discover, or so much as guess at, the reasons, the manner, the circumstances, of what we are taught: all this is absolutely no foundation for disbelieving it. Nay, though we should see difficulties and objections against it, which we could not particularly answer, we should allow them only their proper weight: which may be far overbalanced by the general attestations given of its divine authority.

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For that God is able to communicate many important truths to us, which we have no means of knowing otherwise, concerning his own nature, his designs and dispensations, concerning the inhabitants of the invisible world, and our future state in it, can no more be doubted, than whether we ourselves, according to our various knowledge of men and things, are able to give unexpected and serviceable notices one to another. And that we should understand nothing farther of his secrets than is unfolded to us, nor be capable of answering many questions, that may be asked about them, otherwise than by confessing our ignorance, is so far from being a plea against their being really his, that it is a necessary consequence of it: so far from being strange in supernatural things, that it is common in natural ones. In several articles of revealed religion, we believe things of which we know not the manner or the reasons. But is it there alone, that we do so? In the whole of God's creation, what do we meet with, that is not, more or less, of the same sort? We know not the essence of our own mind, nor the precise distinctions of its several faculties: and why then should we hope to comprehend, or deny because we cannot comprehend, the personal characters, which, we are told, exist in the substance of the godhead? We know not, how *the soul and flesh is one man*: what wonder if we know not, how *God and man is one Christ*? (Ath. Creed.) We are ignorant how the vicissitudes of day and night, summer and winter, are produced: how the fruits of the earth nourish us: how bodies cohere, or impel each other: how our several sensations are performed: how we move an hand or an eye, though it is our own doing. Familiar as these things are; the manner of them, when examined to the bottom, hath obscurities, which the most learned will never penetrate. *I beheld, saith the preacher, all the work of God,—that is done under the sun. Though a man labour to seek it out, yet shall he not find it: yea farther, though a wise man think to know it, yet shall he not be able.* (Eccl. viii. 17.) Surely then we may content ourselves to act in matters of faith, as in those of sense: and believe what we do understand, the thing itself in general; though many circumstances remain, which we understand not,

and therefore are not required to believe any thing in relation to them.

Again: in the frame of nature and the scheme of providence we discern indeed evident proofs of wisdom and goodness: but with innumerable particulars intermixed, which we perceive not to be at all useful, or the creation any way the better for them. Yet we never think of excepting these from amongst the works of God: never doubt of their having a real, though unknown, subserviency to valuable ends. Why, just so in the gospel-revelation: look upon the general plan, and it is undeniably adapted to promote the Divine honour, and human virtue and happiness: but how some points are conducive to them, we see less clearly, or perhaps not at all. Yet still, as they are parts of a system confessedly good, and clearly proved; and we cannot expect to comprehend all the secret connexions and references in God's moral government of us, which extends to eternity, and may extend to worlds far out of our sight; it is unreasonable beyond expression, to refuse believing any thing, till we know the ground of every thing: and to deny that implicit faith to our Maker in some few instances, which we are obliged in so many to have in one another. Scornful rejection of doctrines, that have all the outward marks of his authority, merely because we cannot investigate the inward reasons or complete scheme of them, would be shocking irreverence in the highest of his creatures: and much worse doth it become our low rank of being, and the lamentable weakness of our degenerate faculties. *Hardly do we guess aright at things, that are upon earth, and with labour do we find the things, that are before us: but the things that are in heaven, who hath searched out? And thy counsel who hath known, except thou give wisdom, and send thy holy spirit from above?* (Wisd. ix. 16.)

Further yet: should a revelation contain assertions, that appear in themselves unlikely; and liable to objections, that we are at a loss how to solve: even this, though perhaps it might justly, in certain cases, weaken our assent, yet would by no means be sufficient to prevent or destroy it. Some difficulties may perplex us, merely for want of the knowledge, that other men have. Some subjects, as far as we can judge, have difficulties on every

every possible supposition : which therefore, lying equally against all, cannot be urged against any one in particular : for something must be true. Many points, which our own reason proves to us, for example, concerning the attributes of God, natural and moral, are embarrassed with perplexities belonging to them, as hard to be unravelled, as any thing that Scripture teaches, on these or any other heads. Indeed whenever a finite mind hath an infinite object before it ; or one, which, though limited, is too large for its grasp, the most accurate arguments upon it will thwart one another. Throughout the material world are facts, of which, on proper testimony, we are very justly persuaded, though we cannot answer half the objections, that a subtle reasoner may bring against them. Concerning the free actions of our own minds, doubts have been raised, which, I believe, no man pretends he can remove. In the wisest conduct of any worldly affair, steps may be taken, for which they can never account, who are acquainted with it only in part. And surely much less ought we to think of having the nature and the ways of God brought down to our poor apprehensions. Not that every seeming difficulty in religion, or in revelation, is a real one. Some persons have made things darker, than they are : others have wanted to make them clearer, than they can be : and between them, unmeaning words, and unwarrantable notions, have been added to those of scripture : which hath thus been charged with what it never meant to say. But we own, after these mistakes are rectified, there will be room for plausible suggestions against some of its doctrines. And they should neither be dissimbled on one hand, nor exaggerated on the other : such weight as they have, when those abatements from it have been made, which the considerations now mentioned to you require, should be fairly allowed them. But then the various evidences of the gospel should be allowed their weight also : and whoever doth that honestly, will never reject it, or any article of it.

Some indeed, who are far from rejecting it on the whole, fancy however, that they do it service by interpreting the mysterious parts of it in such a manner, as will reduce them to the level of our conceptions : and so are free in wresting

holy writ from its obvious meaning, to fix upon it what they deem a more rational one. Now certainly a single expression, or even a number of scattered expressions, must not always be taken in the most rigid sense. The nature of the thing, the genius of the language, the custom of the writer, his context, the general scope of his doctrine, and of theirs with whom his may be fitly compared, in short, all just rules of judging ought to be called in, to settle the import of any difficult passage : and nothing more built on a few words, than can be well supported ; especially no article, that is at once of great consequence and improbable. But still there is an opposite extreme, too frequent, and very dangerous, of explaining things away. The sacred authors are not to have a forced construction put upon them, to make them suit our notions the better : but we must examine impartially what they really deliver ; and take it as it is, with the difficulties belonging to it. For though the attempt of altering the scheme of revelation, in order to defend it, may be a well-meant officiousness, it is an irreverent, an unjustifiable, and will be an unsuccessful one. Giving up as indefensible, what is truly scriptural, is so far casting off scripture : and unbelievers will refute our interpretations, and take advantage of our concessions : whereas, keeping close to the plan of God's word, we need not fear maintaining our ground. The disputed articles were doubtless made parts of it for wise motives : for many, in all likelihood, which we see not ; and for some, which we do see. Our life on earth is a state of trial. Many things try, how we conduct our affections : why may not some be placed in our way for the moral exercise of our understandings ? Thus we shall have an opportunity of shewing, whether, on the one hand, we will idly neglect employing our reason at all, or, on the other, presumptuously exalt it against our Maker ; or whether, avoiding both errors, we will carefully use our own faculties, and duly respect his omniscience. By adhering to this medium, the first Christians preserved the doctrine of the Gospel in such purity, that Irenæus writes concerning them thus : " Neither will the most able man, who presides in the church, say other than this, (for no one is above his Master) ; nor the weakest diminish any thing from what

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what hath been delivered. For the faith being one and the same: neither he, that can say much about it, adds to it; nor he, that can say little, takes away."

III. The last rule, implied in the text, is, that we should allow every divine truth its due influence on our behaviour. For we are to learn them, *that we may do all the words of this law.*

Indeed merely receiving the truth in the love of it (2 Thess. ii. 10.) is a moral act: and in some cases may be one of great virtue. Whence our Saviour saith of St. Thomas; *Blessed are they, that have not seen, and yet have believed* (John xx. 29.): blessed in proportion to the integrity of their judgment, not the positiveness of their persuasion. But scarce will it be found, that any article of faith is proposed for the probation of this only. Each hath its practical consequences either flowing of necessity from it, or built with propriety upon it. In proportion as we know God, we are to glorify him as God (Rom. i. 21.): according to every particular, which the scripture hath manifested concerning him. And the several obligations, incumbent on us, towards him, ought not to be estimated, however commonly they are, by their influence on the affairs of our present life, but by the stress, which he, who alone knows the proper one, hath laid upon them. Our performance of these obligations, as it was the true motive to the delivery of each article, is the just measure of our belief in it. If we know enough of the mysterious doctrines in religion, to fulfil those duties, of which they are each respectively the foundation, our knowledge, however imperfect, is sufficient. And if those duties remain unfulfilled, the completest knowledge will not avail us. Nor indeed will the completest practice of such duties alone: for we must *do all the words of God's law* (Deut. xxvii. 26.): and the plainer any part of it is, the less excusable the neglect of it will be. Our first and most evident, and therefore strongest obligations are to the dictates of our inward nature. Other things are necessary for such as have the means of being acquainted with them. But these lie within the reach of all men; and all should observe them preferably to whatever can be matter of dispute. Living agreeably to clear rules is the method of obtaining light into those, which are

obscure. *For, if any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God* (John vii. 17.): whereas it is no wonder, that they, who put away a good conscience, concerning faith make shipwreck. (1 Tim. i. 19.) Or however orthodox any man's belief may be, if his life be bad, as he fails in one essential part of answering the design of the Gospel, he must fail of the rewards, and incur the punishments of it.

But, though every instance of Christian behaviour will be indispensably required of those, who make profession of Christianity: yet one deserves particular mention, since the apostle hath mentioned it particularly in relation to the present subject. *Though I understand all mysteries, and all knowledge, and have all faith,—and have no charity, I am nothing.* (1 Cor. xiii. 2.) Now this virtue is a very comprehensive one: but so far as it belongs peculiarly to the matter before us, it consists in disposing us to gentle treatment of those who differ from us in points of speculation, and of consequent practice; especially when such points are either doubtful in themselves, or perplexed by the arts of controversy, or when men are unfitted by involuntary prejudices to judge rightly concerning them. We must indeed think as we apprehend reason and scripture to direct us, both of the importance of things, and the conduct of men. On proper occasions too our opinion must be declared. We are by no means to acknowledge, either in our words or actions, those for sound believers, whom we conceive not to be such: nor to show indifference about doctrines, which appear to us of moment to the salvation of mankind. Errors may proceed from as blameable a temper, and produce as mischievous effects, as the grossest immoralities. And we may deem and pronounce a man's condition to be dangerous on account of his errors; yet have the truest good-will and compassion for him; nay, and the highest regard in other respects.

But if we are hasty in suspecting, or unfair or only rigorous in interpreting, vehement or artful in censuring, or inwardly pleased with thinking harshly: then begins that inhuman sin of uncharitableness; against which we ought to guard ourselves, by recollecting every circumstance, that can make in favour of our brethren. Sometimes men appear to

differ, when they do not : or to differ much more widely, than they do : their expressions vary strangely, and perhaps are quite opposite ; when, had they but coolness and clearness enough to understand one another, they mean, at least very nearly, the same thing. And this consideration should induce us to interpret with candor the words of those, who may appear to depart from the established doctrines : but then surely they in return ought to interpret with at least equal candor the forms, in which the established doctrines are, and long have been, professed in the church of Christ. But farther : though a person may be in a palpable error, possibly it may be such, as no exceedingly bad consequences will attend : or though the article be important, it may not be essential. Or, however fundamental he may err in one point, he may agree with us in all or most others ; nay, be as zealous for them, as we are : and some kind notice ought to be taken of that.

Besides, let his errors reach to ever so many and material points ; yet, to make him personally criminal in any considerable degree, he must not only have had such means of information, as are, strictly speaking, sufficient ; but his rejection of those means, or failure of being influenced by them, must have arisen from a worse cause, than mere human fallibility, or such inattention and prepossession as are incident to the better sort of minds. For when these alone mislead him, he hath good ground surely for an humble hope, that his gracious Maker will not impute to him for sin, the faults of which he was ignorantly guilty. Still the mistakes, even of such a one, may be greatly detrimental to society, to virtue, to religion : and therefore the public warning of general denunciations against them, may both be useful and requisite, and such denunciations are far from deserving to be condemned as uncharitable. But then they must be understood, like most other general expressions, with due limitations. And, before we can apply them to particular persons, there are so many unknown circumstances to be taken into the account, and so many allowances to be made, which, without seeing into the heart, cannot be made justly, that the rational, as well as Christian, rule is, not to judge another man's servant.

Our concern is, to believe and act right, ourselves : as for those around us, *to their own master they stand or fall*, and we should be very backward to cast those out, whom perhaps *God will receive*. (Rom. xiv. 3, 4.) Or, however bad an opinion we may conceive any peculiar aggravations oblige us to entertain of their future condition in the next world ; or, however necessary we may judge it, *after a first and second admonition to reject* (Tit. iii. 10.) them from communion with us ; we are bound by the most sacred ties, neither to do them any private, nor procure them any public, injury or hardship ; but use them with all possible prudent mildness and tenderness : which is likely to reclaim them if any thing can ; and should it not, they will surely remain objects of pity, as well as dislike.

These are the rules, which plainly suit our present state of imperfection. And may the careful observation of them bring us all safely to a better : wherein, *that which is perfect being come, that which is in part shall be done away*. For now we see through a glass darkly ; but then face to face ; now we know in part ; but then shall we know as also we are known. And now abideth Faith, Hope, Charity, these three : but the greatest of these is Charity. (1 Cor. xiii. 10, 12, 13.)

SERMON V.

By GEORGE HARVEST, M. A.

The true Nature or Notion of a Scripture Mystery.

JOHN iii. 9.

How can these things be ?

THIS is Nicodemus's question to our blessed Saviour, who had been discoursing to him of regeneration, the necessity of a man's being born of water and of the spirit, in order to the being qualified and intitled to an admittance into the kingdom of God ; *Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God*. (ver. 3.) This Nicodemus did not understand ; for, *how*, said he, *can a man be born when he is old ? Can he enter the second time into his mother's womb,*

...umb, and be born? (ver. 4.) How a man could be born again was a mystery to Nicodemus.

From hence let us take occasion to consider what is the true nature or notion of a mystery, in the scripture sense of that word: a subject which has afforded much debate, and that for want of proper definition and distinction in treating of it, which is indeed for the most part the case in all controversies, the generality of disputes being rather about words than things. The reason of my choosing this subject is obvious: the doctrine of the ever-blessed Trinity, which, by the divine assistance, I am about to vindicate against the attacks of heresy and infidelity, is a mystery, and various objections have been offered against it as such. It will therefore be highly useful in defence of this doctrine, to state and adjust the scripture notion of a mystery; and to shew that our catholic doctrine is liable to no objection of moment upon that account. The truth of the doctrine is a different point, which shall be considered another opportunity.

To begin then in due method with the etymological sense of the word Mystery: mystery, originally, that is, in the Hebrew, from whence it came down to us, signifies hidden or secret. And how much soever critics have differed concerning its origin, yet this is certain and allowed that, from whatsoever language we derive the word Mystery, hidden or secret is its original signification.

But the inquiry is, not what the word originally signifies, but what use or custom of speech has made it to signify; and that, whether it agree or disagree with the original, will indeed be the true sense of it. The scripture meaning of mystery must be determined by the use and acceptation of the term in the sacred writings, by comparing scripture with scripture, the surest method of interpretation, and by the comments of antiquity.

This being premised, let us proceed,

First, To consider the abuses, or false applications of the word Mystery.

Secondly, To inquire into the true meaning and intention of the word, as 'tis used in the holy scriptures. And,

First, As to the abuses of the term Mystery, some have defined a mystery to

be, That which is not revealed to us. Now, according to this definition of mystery, 'tis plain there can be no mysteries in revelation, as revelation: but this is contrary to the language of the best writers, who, in treating of the articles of the Christian Faith, are wont to style them mysteries. And whether words be used properly or improperly, with respect to their original signification, yet according to the well-known observation of the heathen poet, 'tis a just rule in language, that the sense of words is to be fixed by the custom of speech, or their ordinary acceptation; and therefore no man can warrantably affix any meaning to a word arbitrarily, or apply it in a sense which is new and different from the common and agreed sense of it. There may, 'tis allowed, be some exception to this rule in a few particular cases, unavoidably arising from the imperfection of language, especially when we are discoursing of matters of abstruse speculation; but then care must always be taken to declare and explain the new sense, what it is we mean to express. If therefore any one should declare that, by a mystery in the gospel, he means that which is absolutely secret and unrevealed; that, concerning which revelation has not made the least discovery; he will be guilty of a great abuse of language in applying the word Mystery, in a sense which is different from its usual and therefore just sense, and withal to no purpose, unless it be to deny what no one will affirm. For undoubtedly, if mystery must stand for that which is absolutely unrevealed, then there is and can be nothing in revelation, as revelation, or as part of revelation, that is a Mystery. If a mystery be something unrevealed, then any thing that is revealed can be no mystery—A shrewd discovery this! and worthy of those who contend, that there are no mysteries in the Christian religion.

Secondly, Others, not less acute reasoners upon the subjects of faith and mysteries, define a mystery to be something of which we have no notion or idea, and thence wisely infer, that it is impossible to believe it. 'Tis certain that a mystery thus defined can be no object of faith or assent, for it is to the mind or understanding no object at all, is nothing. In popular language, it is true,

true, men are apt to say they believe what they have no idea of; but this is but loose and popular language; for, strictly and philosophically speaking, the thing is not possible. Popularly speaking the word Idea signifies a picture or image in the mind of some outward object; but philosophy has extended the sense of it, and applied it to whatever is the object of perception, and in this latter sense of idea it is manifest that there must be some idea, something assented to wherever there is assent, whether it be assent of belief, or of knowledge, for to say, that we believe without ideas, is in truth precisely the same absurdity, as it were to talk of knowing without ideas. To speak accurately, we should distinguish between ideas of imagination and ideas of intellect. Ideas of imagination are pictures, images, or representations in the mind of external correspondent objects. Ideas of intellect are those objects of the understanding which are not imaginable, and have existence in the mind only, such are abstract notions which exist no where but in the understanding, and which may therefore be properly called notions or ideas of intellect, in contra-distinction to those ideas which are the copies or patterns of outward objects, represented by the ideas of imagery or resemblances. But notions or ideas there must be, whenever we can be said to know, or to believe. Every proposition must be a proposition of something to the understanding, of some ideas, otherwise it is no proposition, but mere sounds or syllables. To say, that in such case we may believe the proposition (if it can be called such) to be true, or that it contains a truth, though we do not understand it, or know its meaning, is saying, what? why that we may give our assent, not indeed to that, but to another proposition, namely, that whatever such proposition contains is true, which is a very different thing from the believing the proposition itself. Suppose, for instance, that a divine messenger were to deliver to you a book with this affirmation, that the doctrine contained therein is the word of God. In such case you would believe, not indeed the very doctrine itself, for it would be to you no doctrine till you had read and understood it, but you would give your assent to

this proposition only, that the doctrine contained in that book were the word of God; and in all cases what the thing affirmed or denied in the proposition is, this we must of necessity understand, before it can be to us a proposition at all.

Thirdly, Others again object to us the belief of unintelligible propositions, calling them Mysteries, and the contrary; not reflecting that, as already said, an unintelligible proposition is no proposition; no more than sounds, or syllables, form a proposition. The writing upon the wall was no proposition to Belsazzar, until the interpreter had explained it. Intelligible the proposition must be, otherwise he who delivers it is perfectly a Barbarian, agreeable to St. Paul's reasoning in the xivth chapter of his first epistle to the Corinthians. *He speaketh not unto you, for you understand him not. You know not the meaning of this voice, therefore he that speaketh is a barbarian unto you.* And whenever any proposition in scripture is said to be a Mystery, though indeed the whole reason of the thing, the counsel of God, may be inscrutable perhaps to all created beings, yet the thing itself, *the Mystery*, as the same apostle expresses it, *made manifest to the saints* (Coloss. i. 26.); this cannot but be intelligible, cannot be denied to be understood, without a plain contradiction.

Fourthly, and lastly, Mystery, in the sense last mentioned, is by some objectors of the lowest class confounded with contradiction, which I take notice of to the shame of scepticism and infidelity. Most evidently, mystery so defined is not contradiction, since there can possibly be no repugnancy or disagreement of ideas, which is the essence of contradiction, where there are no ideas, which is their definition of mystery. Nor, on the other hand, can a contradiction be a mystery; for it is a plain and evident falsehood, just as plain and clear to the understanding as any self-evident truth.

The generality of objectors are apt to confound the not understanding, with the not comprehending, whereas, in truth, the one differs from the other as the whole does from a part. Comprehending is knowing or understanding a thing perfectly, adequately. You understand the doctrine of Christ's satisfac-

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tion, which yet perhaps is incomprehensible to the most exalted finite understanding. There may be things in that wonderful transaction between God and man, reasons in the wise counsels of Heaven, of which no created beings can frame any conception. Indeed we comprehend scarce any thing. We understand what matter is, *viz.* an extended, solid substance, we do not comprehend it; we know not its real internal essence, nor many of its modes, properties, and relations. Its substance or essence, whatever it be, is the object of none of our present senses, and is therefore no more to be known even in part, much less comprehended by us, than sound by the deaf, or colour by the blind. So in matters of revelation, what the thing revealed is, this in general we understand, all its reasons and circumstances we do not; that is, we do not comprehend it. —The general truth, the meaning of the proposition is understood; if our ideas are but general, our faith will be so too; and where they fail, where we are entirely in the dark, and have no glimpse of the meaning or sense of a proposition, we can believe or disbelieve nothing about it.

They who would say any thing to the purpose, should define a mystery to be a thing partly known and partly unknown, or rather partially apprehended. So much of it as is hidden is mysterious, what is visible only is apprehended: But this is not the notion of a scripture mystery, as will be seen presently. Besides, according to this definition of mystery, every thing in nature, not meaning the abstract nature of things, but every thing really and actually existing is mysterious, and almost every proposition that can be made about it mysterious, there being nothing among real beings that we do comprehend, or know adequately. This definition therefore, so far as it concerns real existence at least, is useless, through want of possible distinction in the application of it.

The truth is, in every proposition, affirmative or negative, there is something plain, and something mysterious. That which is plain lies in the affirmation or negation, that the thing is, or is not; that which is mysterious, is the manner, or reason, or circumstances of it.

A doctrine then may be considered in these two respects:

First, As to the matter of it, the thing which is revealed.

Secondly, As to the manner of it.

Now the matter only, that it is, is the subject of our belief, and not the manner, how it is, which is secret and hidden from us, and in this alone is the mystery, using that word in the original sense. And this is one reason why the doctrine may be called a mystery; though we do not believe the very mystery itself, yet we believe the doctrine which is mysterious. And this distinction is regarded by many of the ancient fathers, as appears from the following and such like expressions. "You believe that it is, inquire not how.—Search not into those things which are unsearchable.—Believe what is written or revealed. Seek not after what is not written. The divine Three are united and distinguished; how these things are we can neither express nor conceive." St. Theophylact, speaking of the incarnation, says, that God was incarnate (where by the way he prefixes the article to the word God, which I take notice of for a reason well known to all who are acquainted with the Trinitarian controversy), that God was incarnate all men understand; the how, the manner of his incarnation, this is hidden, and upon that account it is a mystery. The distinction between the thing itself, the fact, and how, or manner of it, is very strong and elegant in the original, more so than can be well expressed in an English translation. The manner of divine things, of this neither reason or revelation give us the least conception. We know not what is, or may be, affirmed or denied concerning it, and therefore, in this respect, can believe, or disbelieve, nothing. The fact itself, and that only, is the subject of our belief; the manner is not. And this distinction I apprehend to be of the greatest use and importance, as well to check and restrain the presumption of those who pretend to be *wise above what is written*, as to correct the error of those who reject certain necessary doctrines under pretence of their being mysterious and unsearchable. So it is *written*, is the language of holy Scrip-

Scripture, and 'tis a sufficient answer to them both.

And indeed, even in matters of science or knowledge, the how a thing is, can be no more a subject of assent, than it is in matters of faith or belief. But, in like manner as we believe a thing to be without the believing how it is, so also we know a thing to be, without knowing how it is. We no more know the very mystery in one case, than we believe it in the other. The best system of philosophy demonstrated to be true, by the application of abstract mathematics to the phenomena of nature, is yet, if you consider the how, or the why, in natural causes and effects, full of mysteries. The ways of providence in God's natural government of the world are confessedly mysterious and unsearchable in many respects, but no man makes this an objection to philosophy, or the discovery of the laws and operations of nature. Revelation is a declaration of facts relative to God's moral government. The facts are plain, the reasons and circumstances of them frequently mysterious. But as it is no just objection to our knowledge that the objects of knowledge are mysterious, as to the manner of them, neither is it a just objection to our faith that the objects of faith are, as to the manner and circumstances of them, mysterious; and it is exactly the same absurdity to object to the belief of a fact, because the manner of it is mysterious, as it would be to object to the knowledge of a fact, because the manner of it is unknown or mysterious.

We come now to the great question, What is the true Scripture notion of a Mystery?—The true definition of a mystery, as the word is used in holy Scripture, is this; a doctrine above and not knowable or discoverable by human reason, but discovered by revelation, yet, generally speaking, remaining, in part, unknown after such revelation or discovery.—If there be any other sense of mystery in the Gospel, it concerns not our present purpose, for we are now treating of mystery as it signifies some doctrine, which is the object of belief. And this definition I take to be just, as will appear upon comparing the passages in which the word mystery occurs in holy Scripture. But here, agreeable to this definition, be it observed,

First, That the doctrine, which I call a mystery, is not necessarily supposed to be comprehended, or known adequately, even after it is revealed. Still it remains a mystery, as most natural truths, or truths discovered by the light of nature do, after reason has discovered them in part, that is, in some relations and circumstances mysterious.

Secondly, That the doctrine, the fact itself which is revealed, is as truly intelligible, as any truth that is discovered by the light of nature. I say, what the truth is, is as truly understood in one case, as it is in the other, just as the manner how it is, is in both cases really, I do not say equally mysterious. Take for instance this doctrine, *the dead shall be raised*. This, as a doctrine, a truth revealed, is certainly as plain and clear to the understanding as this natural truth, demonstrable by reason, the soul is immortal. But, how the dead will be raised, with what bodies, the sameness or identity of those with the frail corruptible bodies we are now clothed with; how they will always exist incorruptibly, spiritually, and gloriously—how the soul will be immortal, whether by any internal principle of life, or, as the schoolmen say, by a continual conservation in being, through the will and power of God.—These are questions relating not to the reality of facts, but to the manner of things, confessedly mysterious. But still the mysteriousness of the manner of them is quite a different consideration from that of their certainty and reality; and the truth of the fact, that they are, is not at all obscured, or rendered less plain, by any mysteriousness or difficulty of conception as to the manner of their being.

Thus far natural and revealed truths, in the main agree: in some respects they are both plain, and in other they are both mysterious. Let us now see wherein they differ.

The first obvious difference between them is this, that the one, revealed truths, are supernatural, are above reason, and beyond the reach of it to discover. The other, which we call natural, in contradiction to supernatural, lie within the reach of our faculties. I am now speaking, not of the manner, but of the reality of the things. It is not discoverable by

the light of reason, that they are, and we should be wholly ignorant of them were they not revealed.

Secondly, The manner of them, how they are, this remaining mysterious after they are revealed, is more above our reason, more incomprehensible (if the expression be allowable) than the manner of those truths which are known by reason. It is granted that the manner how things are is, in both cases, alike not apprehended, but it will not thence follow, that they are both equally incomprehensible. For, as we improve and grow up in perfection and knowledge, as our faculties become more and more enlarged and vigorous, and the eyes of our understandings more opened (as they will be in that blessed state when that which is imperfect shall be done away) we shall then know and comprehend those truths which are at the least distance sooner and more readily than those which are more remote from our understandings. There are different degrees of mysteriousness in different things of which it is equally true, that we at present know nothing; and it is by no means a distinction without a difference, to say, that they are equally mysterious, though not mysterious equally, equally mysteries, though not equal mysteries, or one more mysterious than another. Just as all luminous bodies are equally luminous, light as light being the same universally; though all luminous bodies are not luminous equally, or in the same degree. At present we know no more of the substance of matter, than we do of the substance of any being whatever: but no one will therefore pretend, that the substance of matter is mysterious equally with the substance or essence of any being; since one nature will for ever be mysterious to all finite understandings, will for ever, in some respects, be according to the inscription at Athens, the *Unknown God*.

The author of Christianity not mysterious, by which he means, that there are no mysteries in Christianity, (for, by the way, there may be mysteries in Christianity, and yet Christianity itself not be mysterious) lays a mighty stress upon this consideration, that "nothing ought to be esteemed a mystery because we have not adequate ideas of its properties, nor any at all of its essence," and it is the tenor of

this performance, that there are no mysteries in Christianity, because in the same sense or respect in which there are mysteries in revelation, there are mysteries in nature also.—Or thus, If you say that the things revealed in the Gospel are mysteries, for this reason, because they are in part not comprehended; then, for the same reason you must admit, that every, even the most common thing in nature, is mysterious, since nothing is comprehended or known but in part only. But we do not say, that certain matters of revelation are called mysteries for this reason only; and if we did, yet it would not follow that the truths of Christianity are not more mysterious than those of nature. If both Christianity and nature be mysterious in one sense, as we comprehend not the things of either, still the things of another world will be more mysterious than the things of this, or the doctrines of revelation more mysterious than the truths which we know by reason or experience.—The latter are as mysterious as the former, it is admitted, if by as mysterious be meant as truly, or as certainly so, but mysterious equally, or in the same degree they are not.—But to retort the argument, if it be an argument, upon this author, the design of his book is to render the belief of mysteries absurd and impossible. And how does he attempt it? Why, by telling us, that even among the ordinary things of nature, nothing is properly mysterious, or to be called mysterious, because every thing is so. An assertion that is equally levelled against our knowledge, as against our faith.

The third and last general difference between things natural and things supernatural is this, that the former we know by observation and experience, the latter we conceive by analogy. By comparing and likening them to the things of which we have knowledge, by the intervention of our senses. The ideas of sensation and reflexion are the source of all the knowledge that is, and can naturally be, in the human understanding. From these ideas of things natural, we take all our ideas and conceptions of things supernatural, in the way of analogy, or resemblance. Of this truth every one may be experimentally convinced, who will but observe what passes in his own mind, when he is contemplating divine supernatural objects. All the ideas or conceptions therefore

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that we have of those supernatural objects, are no other than pictures or copies of certain unknown originals, and these resemblances, as we imagine them to be, of those objects are never adequate, and oftentimes as improper representations of what they stand for, as a circle is of eternity, or a straight line of moral rectitude. There is therefore manifestly a great difference between our conceptions of natural and supernatural objects. Besides, the latter being not the objects of sense, what *eye hath not seen*, nor *ear heard*, what it is not possible for us to conceive, as they are in their own nature, we assent to the reality of them less readily than we do to the things of experience, as is intimated in those words of our blessed Saviour. *If I have told you earthly things, and you believe not, how shall you believe if I tell you of heavenly things?* (John iii.)

The notion of mystery being stated, and the agreements and differences between natural and supernatural mysteries considered, let us see how the definition given of mystery agrees with the Scripture sense of it.

In the book of Daniel we read, *there is a God in Heaven that revealeth secrets.* [Μυστήρια] (Dan. ii. 28.)

Again, *He revealeth secrets,* [Μυστήρια, Mysteries], *maketh known what shall come to pass.* (Ver. 29.)

In the Gospel according to St. Matthew, *It is given to you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of Heaven.* (Matt. xiii. 11.)

As in St. Paul, 1st Epistle to the Corinthians, *though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries.* (1 Cor. xiii. 2.)

Thus also in the same Epistle, *behold I shew you a mystery.* (1 Cor. xv. 51.) And in his Epistle to the Ephesians, *that I may open my mouth boldly to make known the mysteries of the Gospel.* (Eph. vi. 19.) Likewise in his Epistle to the Colossians, *the mystery which hath been hid from ages and from generations, but now [ἐκ δευτέρου] is made manifest to the saints.* (Coloss. i. 26.)

In these, and all other passages of holy Scripture, the word mystery, wherever a mystery is spoken of as the subject of belief, always signifies a doctrine above, and not knowable by human reason, but made known to us by revelation only, yet generally speaking, remaining in part

unknown, after such revelation or discovery.

But here it may be asked, how, since the notion of mystery is something hidden, secret, or unrevealed; how that which is made known or revealed is yet a mystery. What is this but a self-evident contradiction? I answer,

First, Most certainly, according to the original sense of the word Mystery, that is, secret, or unrevealed, it is a contradiction to affirm that a mystery, when revealed, is still a mystery; nevertheless, it may be rightly stiled a mystery, because not discoverable by the light of reason. It is above reason, and hidden or invisible to the human understanding, and in respect to human reason or understanding, as it was a mystery before revelation discovered it, so it continues to be, in that respect, a mystery. It is still in itself above reason: an object not of our reason, but of our faith.

Secondly, A supernatural truth, though revealed, may yet be justly stiled a mystery in the way of eminence, as being less plain and clear, though sufficiently intelligible to our understandings, than what we know by reason or the light of nature. We conceive divine things, as has been explained by analogy, our notions of them are taken from those objects we knew by experience, and consequently such divine things are more obscure and mysterious than the other, and therefore are peculiarly or eminently mysterious. And this must be allowed by every one, who is not so extravagant as to say that he has as clear ideas of the joys of Heaven, as he has of human felicity; or as perfect and lively a conception of the glorified body St. Paul speaks of, as he has of the ordinary stature and features of a man; or that the awaking from sleep is mysterious equally with the resurrection of the dead. We know, indeed, what is meant by the one, as truly as we do what is meant by the other, but still the things themselves, and their respective modes and properties, differ vastly in point of clearness and certainty for the reason mentioned.

Thirdly, The things revealed may be properly called Mysteries in respect to what they were antecedently to the revelation of them. 'Tis common in all languages, for things to retain their former names, though the ground or reason

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reason of those names has ceased. The like manner of speaking is frequent in holy scripture. Thus St. Matthew is called *the publican* (Matt. x. 3.), when he was a disciple; Simon is called *the leper* (Matt. xxvi. 6.) though he was cleansed. *The dumb spoke* (Matt. ix. 33.), so *the blind see, the lame walk, the deaf hear, &c.* (Matt. xi. 5.). And there is great propriety in this language, as it is oftentimes of use, to remind us what things or persons have been. Thus the miracle of the water that was turned into wine is strongly intimated by the calling it water after its transmutation; and the like may be said of the same manner of expression in the other instances. Mysteries, therefore, may be justly stiled mysteries, (John ii. 9.), after they are revealed, even though the word mystery be used in its original sense.

Fourthly, They who insist most upon the plainness and clearness of what is revealed, in opposition to mysteries, must, after all, admit that in the things that are revealed, in the nature or manner of them, there is still something absolutely mysterious, be the doctrine itself ever so clear and intelligible. Just as in St. Paul's epistles, *there are* [δυσνόητα] *some things hard to be understood,* (2 Peter iii. 16.), not indeed the doctrines themselves therein delivered which are plain, but some things in those doctrines, or some matters relating to those doctrines. So that a doctrine may be plain and clear, and yet there may be things in, or relating to it, in the nature and reason of which things, there is mystery, as mystery signifies hidden or secret; and the doctrines may, in that respect, be called mysterious, as containing or including such mysteries.

Fifthly, and lastly, To put an end to the question, how any thing can be called a mystery, after it is revealed? what is this but the affixing a wrong sense to the term mystery, and then inquiring how, according to that sense, any thing can be a mystery after it is revealed. A question that deserves no answer. The true definition has been already given, according to which, hidden or secret (which is the sense in which it is used by the objector) is so far from being the right sense, that, on the contrary, the being not hidden but revealed, or dis-

covered, is part of the very definition of mystery, and included in the notion of it, agreeable to the language of holy scripture. A mystery is a doctrine, the belief of a mystery is the belief of a doctrine, otherwise we are contending about mere words only.

And now what I would observe and infer from the foregoing discourse is this, that, since a mystery is neither a thing not revealed, nor that of which we have no notion or idea, nor an unintelligible proposition, nor a contradiction, nor any such thing as the opposers of the belief of mysteries usually define it to be; but a doctrine above and not discoverable by reason, but made known by revelation, yet, generally speaking, remaining in part unknown after such revelation or discovery; the doctrine of the ever-blessed Trinity, or any other doctrine of holy scripture, is liable to no just objection upon account of its being a mystery, which is the point I have been endeavouring to make good.

What the true scripture doctrine of the Trinity is, this has been a matter of much controversy. The only reasonable question concerning it, is what is written? not meaning the bare words of scripture, but the sense of it. For the faith of the gospel is that sense of the words of scripture, which was affixed to them, or intended by the sacred writers. And this faith, the true sense and intention of scripture, is to be determined with respect to every one's self, ultimately indeed by his private judgment, but then that judgment, though it ought not to be absolutely governed and overruled, is yet to be assisted, guided and directed by the proper means of information, among which, though we disclaim name and thing, that absolute authority, that infallibility of direction which the church of Rome pretends to, yet certainly the judgment of the church of Christ in all ages, especially in those nearest the days of our blessed Lord and his Apostles, the purest and most unprejudiced ages, when it is infinitely reasonable to suppose the truth did prevail, this sense and judgment of the catholic church cannot but carry with it weight and authority, not only by virtue of the gospel promises of grace, and assistance to the church, but from the reason of the thing itself. As for those who wildly maintain

that there can be no medium between no authority in religion and absolute authority; that any authority is inconsistent with private judgment, and the like; what do they but affirm, that a man can have no guide at all, unless he have one who is infallible? That the traveller, who entertains any doubt, is in any uncertainty about his right way, must either blind himself, and be intirely resigned into the hand of an infallible guide, or else, in the other extreme, resolve to proceed upon the mere strength of his own reason or conjecture, discarding all direction or advice whatever. Every man is ultimately to be determined in matters of belief, as well as in matters of practice, by his own understanding; but yet that understanding is to be informed, is to be influenced, is to be directed by all proper means and motives, which if disregarded, or not attended to, if wilfully or carelessly neglected, in things of importance, no error will appear innocent at the great day of account, but highly criminal, as owing to a wicked insincerity, the not sincerely desiring and endeavouring to know the truth, by the means of information; nor does a person's being determined by his own understanding, or by reason, as I have stated the notion of private judgment, afford any objection against his submitting to authority in cases where authority is rightly conceived to take place, for there authority itself is good reason; reason sufficient to determine every wise man, where his own understanding is short-sighted and defective.

With respect to the doctrine of the Trinity, the testimony of those ancient writers, the fathers of the church, has always been of weight with the sober and judicious, nor indeed can it well be supposed that they did err, in this important article of religion, without laying a foundation for such scepticism as will extend itself farther backward than their ages. And here it may not be improper to enter a caution against a piece of art, that has lately been employed in order to render their testimony suspected at least, in matters of doctrine, by weakening or destroying their testimony as to matters of fact. The fathers, we are told, have been the authors of a great deal of delusion and falsehood. Now this must have been, either through want of ability, or want of integrity. If they wanted inte-

grity they might misrepresent truths, doctrines or opinions, as well as facts: If they were defective in point of ability, were weak and credulous, there can be no great dependence upon their representations of opinions or doctrines prevailing in their days, more than upon their reports of other facts, (for facts these are), and this will also proportionably lessen their authority in deciding controversies about the sense of holy scripture, which greatly depends upon their knowledge of facts, customs and doctrines prevailing in their days, upon which account they are justly presumed to be more able judges of, better qualified to interpret scripture than we at this distance of time from the purest ages can be. They therefore who give up the point of the ability of the fathers, as some advocates for Christian antiquity have done, contenting themselves with maintaining their piety and integrity, do the cause they undertake to defend a disservice.

To conclude—*Beware*, says the Apostle, *lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ.* (Coloss. ii. 8.) It was pride that was the condemnation of the devil. It was pride and the unlawful desire of being wise, that occasioned the fall of our first parents, and the same pride has been the source of all that opposition to faith and mysteries, supported by philosophy and vain deceit, or vain and deceitful philosophy, after the rudiments of this world, that has been perpetually giving birth to heresies, and causing divisions in the church of Christ. It is the pride of a wisdom, falsely so called, intirely owing to a real ignorance of our own imperfections; for the true reason why we are apt to flatter ourselves with the conceit of being wise, is because we are not so. Were we but duly sensible of our ignorance, we should be convinced that we see but a very little, understand less, and, comparatively speaking, comprehend nothing. Could we but look upwards, and see how vastly we are excelled in every perfection, by intelligent beings above us, we should then have very different and more just sentiments of our own littleness and imperfection. Could we but see upwards as we can downwards in the climax or scale of existence, we should be so far from imagining

gining ourselves to be at the top of the rational creation, (as without the light of revelation we might be apt to do), that we should probably find ourselves at the very bottom of it. At the top indeed of all corporeal and visible beings, but inferior to the lowest order in the immaterial and invisible world; and that, as we belong wholly to neither, being partly material, and partly immaterial, we only stand related to the world of spirits by such a connection in the climax or gradation of being, as the different species of creatures are linked together within this!

The grand and excellent use of these and such reflexions as these, is to destroy the pride of human reason, and to teach us humility. To remove those prejudices against the mysteries of religion, which the being wise in our own eyes is apt to furnish us with. To convince us of the reasonableness of believing readily what the incomprehensible God, whose nature is mystery, thinks fit to reveal; and of obeying without reluctance what he commands; though the real nature or manner of the thing in one case, or the reason and fitness in the other, be past finding out. If we truly desire knowledge and improvement in intellectual perfection, let us be meek and humble; waiting with contentment and patience, searching after it with submission and reverence; and it shall be given us of him *in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom.* (Coloss. ii. 3.) *He, who layeth up sound wisdom for the righteous* (Prov. ii. 7), will reward our hope with enjoyment, and our faith with vision and certainty; and enrich our understandings with the knowledge of those divine truths, which, though we can neither see nor bear them now, shall be uncovered and revealed to us hereafter, when the seals of that book of providence which is now shut shall be loosed.

Excellent are the words of the pious and eminently-learned Bishop Bull to this purpose, in his immortal book (Def. Fid. Nicæn. sub finem), which is an everlasting testimony against the Arian heresy. "In hac rerum caligine de mysteriis divinis, tanquam pueri et sentimus et loquimur, imo balbutimus potius. Hic dum sumus Deum nostrum tanquam in speculo et ænigmate contemplamur. Adveniet verò tempus, imo

omni tempore ulterior æternitas, quæ ipsum videbimus facie ad faciem, tenebras omnes tunc à mentibus nostris beatifica Dei visio fugabit." So long as we are in this world we see and contemplate our God, as it were through a glass indistinctly, obscurely; but a time will come, yea, even eternity beyond all time, when we shall see him as in a glass or mirror, face to face. Then shall the beatific vision of God dispel all darkness and ignorance from our understandings. How we shall see God hereafter, is an absolute mystery; that we shall see him, the Scripture assures us: may we all be found worthy to be admitted into his presence, and understand what the happiness of seeing God is, by living in the enjoyment of it for ever and ever.

Now, to the most holy Trinity, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, of the same eternal undivided nature and perfections, be rendered and ascribed, as is most due, all power and dominion, praise and worship, glory and majesty for evermore!

S E R M O N VI.

By JOSEPH TRAPP, D.D.

The Difficulties in Religion, and the Scriptures, no Argument against either: and the Folly and Wickedness of perverting those Difficulties to wrong Purposes.

2 PET. iii. 16, 17.

— In which are some things hard to be understood; which they that are unlearned and unstable, wrest, as they do also the other Scriptures, to their own destruction.

Ye therefore, beloved, seeing ye know these things before; beware lest ye also, being led away by the error of the wicked, fall from your own steadfastness.

THE former clause of the text, being an imperfect sentence, necessarily refers us to the words preceding it. St. Peter was just before speaking of our blessed Saviour's coming to judgment: and having shewn the thing itself to be most certain, though the time was doubtful, and perhaps at a distance; he proceeds thus: *Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent that ye may be found of him without spot, and blameless.*

And account that the long-suffering of our Lord is salvation ; even as our beloved brother Paul also, according to the wisdom given unto him, hath written unto you ; as also in all his Epistles, speaking in them of these things. In which are some things hard to be understood, &c. (Ver. 14, &c.) Whether the relative *which* is to be referred to the things here spoken of, or to St. Paul's Epistles, may admit of a question: the vulgar reading makes it respect the first-mentioned; but some particular copies the last. However it be, the difference is not material; and the assertion is true in either sense: it being undeniable, that both St. Paul's Epistles in general, and the doctrines here mentioned in particular, do really contain things hard to be understood. I shall from the words take occasion to discourse upon a subject of a wider extent than either of those (which ever it be) which is immediately, and directly, included in them.

I believe it may with truth be affirmed, that no one folly whatsoever hath contributed more to the reigning wickedness of the world; than a certain levity of mind, by which men amuse themselves with the difficulties of religion; so as to neglect what is easy and indisputable in it, the main substance which it contains, and the main proofs upon which it relies. This kind of trifling makes infidels of some, and very bad believers of more. This enervates their virtue, inflames their passions, corrupts their wills, and perplexes their understandings. It so confounds their ideas, and gives them such a whirl of thinking, that they are never settled all their lives long; but are always *like children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine* (Eph. v. 14.); *ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth.* (2 Tim. iii. 6.) And the reason of it seems to be this: The desire of knowledge, in those who employ their intellectual faculties, is a restless and unquiet principle; and by this, as well as other appetites, we are inclined to be always grasping and reaching at things which we have not, so as to slight and overlook what we actually have. And it is indeed so far laudable; that we ought not to sit down content with the first rudiments of instruction, but daily to proceed, and improve in true knowledge; especially in religious matters which are of the utmost

moment and concern to us. But then we should carefully distinguish between what is capable of being known by us, and what is not; by no means suffering the one to debar us from the benefit of the other. I shall therefore at this time endeavour to regulate the conduct of our wills and understandings in this important affair; and, because it is a subject of the highest consequence with regard to our practice, I shall consider it, though briefly, yet as distinctly as I can, in these five following particulars, which seem naturally to rise from the words before us.

I. First, I observe, that there are difficulties in religion, *things hard to be understood*; though not near so many as are sometimes pretended.

II. Secondly, I shall enquire in what sense, and how many ways, those difficulties may be said to be wrested.

III. Thirdly, I shall remark upon that part of the character here given of those who so wrest them; that they are unlearned and unstable: which I shall make out, by considering in point of reason the exceeding absurdity of those objections which are raised from the difficulties of religion.

IV. Fourthly, I shall shew the folly and danger of such arguing, in relation to practice; from this part of their character, that they wrest those difficulties to their own destruction, and are wicked as well as foolish, in so doing.

V. Fifthly and lastly, I shall enforce the exhortation of the Apostle; that we may not be led away by this error of the wicked, and fall from our own steadfastness.

I. In the first place then I observe; that there are difficulties in religion, *things hard to be understood*; though not near so many as are sometimes pretended. There are two different sorts of persons, both enemies to religion, who assault it by contrary methods. Some representing the difficulties of it as more, and greater; others, as fewer, and less, than they really are. The former say the whole is mysterious, unintelligible, inconsistent; there being so much obscurity, and diversity of interpretation, that one knows not what to fix upon, or how to frame a judgment concerning it. The latter tell us there are no mysteries in Christianity, nay no considerable difficulties;

culties; laying it down for a maxim, that all matters of faith ought to be plain at first view, and that to the meanest capacity. And therefore whenever a point appears mysterious or obscure to themselves; they go a very short way, and, without more ceremony, reject it, as false and spurious. How false both those opinions are, I shall shew in its proper place: At present I observe, that the truth happens to lie just between them; there are real difficulties in religion, though not near so many, as some pretend. In the phrase of the text it is expressly asserted, that there are difficulties; and implied that there are not very many: *δυσκότα τινε, some things hard to be understood.* I shall come to the proof of particulars under my third general head, upon which the main stress of this discourse will turn: I here only make this observation, as previous, and preparatory to what follows.

II. The second thing I proposed, was to consider, in what sense, and how many ways, those difficulties may be said to be wrested. The original word *καταστρέφω* signifies either distorting a thing contrary to its natural bent and tendency; or racking it so, as to make it speak a sense it knows nothing of. Easy, as well as difficult, places of scripture are often thus tormented; which is here implied by the Apostle in those words, *as they do also the other scriptures.* Some men find out ways to prove their own doctrines, even from those texts which are most plainly and directly levelled against them; libertinism of practice from St. Paul's discourses upon faith, and the duty of rebellion from the thirteenth chapter of the epistle to the Romans. But I am now obliged to confine myself to the difficulties of religion: which we may wrest, either, 1. By perverting them to our own preconceived opinions: or, 2. By making them more difficult than they really are: or, 3. By drawing wrong consequences from them to the prejudice of religion, or of Christianity, in general. These particulars are so plain, that to mention them is sufficient: I only observe, that the last of them naturally leads us to the third thing I proposed; viz.

III. To remark upon that part of the character here given of those who wrest the things hard to be understood, that

they are *unlearned and unstable*; and to consider in point of reason the exceeding absurdity of those objections which are raised from the difficulties of religion. In giving the character of such men, the Apostle makes no observation concerning the acuteness of their wit, or the freedom of their thinking: But on the contrary tells us, that they are *unlearned and unstable*; words, far from flattering the vanity of human understanding. And here by *unlearned* are not meant those only who have no learning at all; but also, and indeed chiefly, those who have some, and not much. The first are commonly modest, and willing to be instructed; but the last are extremely apt to be forward and assuming, and to meddle in matters which are *too high for them.* (Psalm cxxxi. 1.) They are proud of their little knowledge; which they would not be of great: for the more a man truly knows, the more sensible he is of what he does not know. And therefore Festus was mistaken in his reflection upon St. Paul, *much learning seldom makes a man mad* (Acts xxvi. 24.); a little often does. And hence it is that those impious books which are published against religion, are generally written by smatterers in science, who have just enough to display their want of it, to the greater advantage; just enough to enable them to cavil, and raise small objections; (the easiest thing in the world for every trifler to do:) objections, from which no moral truth, requiring proof, can be entirely free, though it be established upon demonstration: and so they triumph for a few days, till a person of real learning comes upon them, and exposes to public scorn the miserable folly and ignorance, as well as profaneness and blasphemy, of their boasted arguments. Of which we have very lately had (Phileleutherus Lipsienfis) such an instance, as was scarce ever seen in the world before. The other epithet which the Apostle joins with the former, is *unstable*. Such persons are always sceptical and captious; doubtful and uncertain; of a fluttering and volatile temper; catching at every thing, and adhering to nothing: which proceeds from a great defect of good sense, learning, and religion. From the plain words of the Apostle then may be gathered this proposition; that thus to wrest difficult points, is an argument of

ignorance, and instability. And this proposition will be abundantly made out, after we shall have fully considered the three following particulars.

1. That the main proofs and substance of our religion are sufficiently plain; and that the difficulties of it are not near so many, nor so considerable, as some pretend.

2. That those difficulties which are really in it, are no manner of argument against it. And,

3. That there are very good reasons to be given why there should be some difficulties in religion; and that they are so far from being an argument against it, that they are a confirmation of it.

If these three particulars, I say, be clearly made out; all objections drawn from the *things hard to be understood* will be cut up by the roots, and the very foundations of them entirely overturned.

1. In the first place then I am to shew, that the main proofs and substance of our religion are sufficiently plain; and that the difficulties of it are not near so many, nor so considerable, as some pretend. The being of God is matter of clear demonstration; and the miserable absurdity and madness of all the cavils against it has been so exposed, that nothing in the world ever appeared more ridiculous. Then for the truth of revealed religion; that working by the power of God is an evident proof of a commission from him, is a proposition which itself needs no proof: that innumerable miracles were wrought by Christ and his Apostles, is matter of plain fact, and of human faith, supported by as much, nay far more evidence, than any other point of history at that distance of time; which yet was never denied, or so much as questioned by any body. The standing proofs of it, as the wonderful propagation of the gospel, the fulfilling of our Saviour's prophecies in the destruction of Jerusalem, and the dispersion of the Jews, who at this day are witnesses of that very religion which they deny, are so plain and manifest, that they are not capable of any dispute. As are likewise the wonderful agreement between the Old and New Testament, which, like a pair of indentures, answer to each other; and the genuineness of those books which are ascribed to the sacred writers. The fall of man, and the original corruption of human nature;

the redemption of mankind by Jesus Christ; the doctrines of the Trinity, and incarnation, and all the rules of virtue and good living, are as plainly laid down as words can express. Nor are there any difficulties, which can with any tolerable reason be pretended to overthrow the foundation of these doctrines. For suppose we do not understand the manner of the Trinity and incarnation, the things themselves are as expressly delivered, as words can convey things to us: that it is so, is directly revealed; if it be asked, how it is so? The answer is ready, that is not revealed. All that we are required to believe, is plain enough; for the rest, viz. the manner, as it is not revealed, so our faith is not required concerning it. And where is the mighty hardship of all this? That there is, that there can be, but one God, we can prove by scripture, at least, if not by reason: that the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost are God, we can prove by scripture: from whence it follows, that those three are that One God. Suppose in another instance, that there are difficulties about the fall of man, and original sin (which indeed are, to my apprehension, by much the greatest difficulties in all the scriptures), and about fore-knowledge in God compared with freewill in ourselves: that our nature is miserably corrupt, is but too sadly manifest by experience: that the doctrines I just now mentioned are true, is most certain, because we can prove them from the scriptures; which we can prove to be divinely inspired. One thing we may be sure of, and that ought to satisfy us; that by the nature of God, he cannot be unjust, however unaccountable these things may appear to our shallow understandings. If *his judgments be a great deep*, yet still *his justice standeth like the strong mountains* (Ps. xxxvi. 6.); and though *clouds and darknesses are round about him*, yet *righteousness and equity are the habitation of his seat*. (Ps. xcvi. 2.) It is enough for us that we are sure a remedy is prepared for this distemper, that means are provided to rectify our corrupt nature; and if we do not apply them, it is our own fault.

But here it is carefully to be observed, that difficulties, as they are managed, are of several sorts. 1. Those which are really nothing in themselves, but owe all their force to the follies and thoughtlessness

ness of those who make them. Thus for example; they are extremely scandalized at the various opinions which there are in religion; never considering, that the main proofs and substance of it, as I have shewn, are abundantly plain, and agreed in; and besides, that there is most certainly such a thing as truth in the world, though there may be much falshood and prejudice. They are moreover exceedingly offended at the ill lives of most Christians, and even of some whose particular character and profession should oblige them to holiness. But this stumbling-block likewise would be soon removed; would they but consider, 1. That a great part of what is here alledged is not true in fact; and, by the way, it would be much better if such persons would reflect more upon their own lives, and less upon other peoples. And, 2. If it were all true, yet the violation or transgression of a law is by no means an argument against that law. Further, they are staggered at heresies, and heterodox doctrines: which they would not be, did they but once reflect (as they may as often as they please) that were there not some tenets propagated which are false, the Christian religion would not be true. Since it is in many places of scripture expressly prophesied, that there should be apostacy, false prophets, and damnable heresies: so far are these things from being an objection against Christianity, that they are a direct confirmation of it, even while they are intended to overturn it. To give one other instance; such persons as these are wonderfully solicitous about the state and condition of the Jews, Pagans, Mahometans, and all other sorts of infidels: which amusement, by the way, often makes them little better than infidels themselves. Whereas, did they but ever so little reflect, they would soon be sensible that this enquiry is the thing of the world the most vain and idle. For besides, that it appears from reason and scripture, that all persons, invincibly ignorant of Christianity, will be judged by that law which they have; and though the best of them can lay no claim to the salvation of the gospel, being not included in the covenant of Christ; yet the merits of that Christ will be so far extended even to them who know him not, as that they shall be rewarded for living up to the dic-

tates of their consciences, and the best of their knowledge: I say, though this be agreeable to reason and scripture; yet whether it be, or no, what is it to us? We know our own dispensation, and our own duty; let us stick to that; and for the case of others, let us leave it to Him, who made both us and them. Sure we are, that to be born under the gospel, in the midst of the clearest light, and to be included in the covenant of grace, is the greatest privilege imaginable: but after this, to enquire curiously into the case of others, is just as reasonable, as if a favourite subject entrusted with particular instructions by his prince, should, instead of obeying them, spend his time in enquiring after another man's instructions, which he has nothing at all to do with. Could any of us speak to our blessed Saviour himself, and, pointing to a Heathen standing by, ask our Saviour in the language of St. Peter upon another occasion, *Lord, and what shall this man do?* (John xxi. 21.) How properly would the same answer fit the enquirer, *What is that to thee? Follow thou me.* (Ver. 22.) How properly, I say, would that answer fit him; were it not that he deserved a much severer?

2dly, Another sort of difficulties are those which are really considerable, but yet very capable of being explained by industry and application. Of these there are many instances both in points of doctrine, and in texts of scripture: they are *hard to be understood*; but still they are capable of being understood. It is true, they are difficult: and so are all languages, all arts and sciences, all trades and professions, before they are learnt: but then they may be learnt; and actually are so, by those who diligently apply themselves to the study of them. And yet nothing is more common than for those who are not versed in these matters, to pass very rash censures upon them. They do not understand them, and therefore presently conclude that nobody does. Then out of pride, or laziness, or both, they acquiesce in their own ignorance; and, to excuse it, alledge that these places are inconsistent, or unintelligible: and so the scriptures must bear the blame of the vices and follies of those who read them. Whereas in truth, the discoveries which have been made by learned divines in interpreting the abstruse and seemingly inexplicable

inexplicable places of holy scripture, are wonderful and astonishing. Many things, which seemed impossible to be understood, have been made as clear as the sun at noon-day: and gradual discoveries have been in different ages, and still are, made of them, some by one, and some by another; not only in the darkest parts of St. Paul's epistles here mentioned by St. Peter, but in all the other books both of the Old and New Testament, both as to points and doctrine, and matters of fact, to the history of things past, and prophecies of things to come. To give an instance or two out of many: the account of the seventy weeks revealed by the angel to Daniel, with relation to the time of the Messiah, has been justly reckoned one of the most obscure passages in all the holy scriptures; and yet it has been very much cleared by the labours of expositors, especially by two most learned divines of our own church. Nay it is observable, that even that so much despaired of book, the Revelation, though it be embarrassed with difficulties not yet accounted for, yet contains many things as plain prophecies, and as plainly fulfilled, as can well be imagined. The great dragon that persecuted the woman with her child, the flood that he cast out of his mouth after her; the other woman of a different character, who was drunk with the blood of the saints, &c. are manifest predictions of the great defection and apostasy from the church, of the deluge of heresies, and other corruptions, which overspread it, of the inundation of arianism, mahometism, and popery, and of the cruel persecutions which the true disciples of Christ have underwent, partly from Heathens, and partly from false Christians. Very many instances of the same kind might be given; did either the time permit, or the nature of the subject require.

But, 3dly, Another sort of real difficulties are those which are not yet wholly understood by us; and which with all our industry we are not able to explain: such as the Trinity, and incarnation, the fall of man, original sin, and some others. For that there are some such as these, we readily grant: but then even these are no manner of argument against our religion; which was the second point I proposed to speak to. And the truth

of it will abundantly appear; if we duly consider these two particulars.

1. That there are very great difficulties, nay mysteries, not only in religion, but in every thing which the mind of man is conversant about: in all professions, in all parts of philosophy, in all arts and sciences, nay in the most obvious and common objects both of the understanding, and of the senses. Of these I shall produce many instances in my next discourse, and shall not now insist upon them: nor indeed is there any occasion for it; since in truth there is no one thing whatsoever, whether it be body, or spirit, in ourselves, or in other beings, whose nature and manner of existence we fully understand. Why then should not religion be allowed to have some difficulties, as well as every thing else? And why should mystery be an objection against that only? especially if we consider in the second place,

2. That from the nature of the things compared with our understandings, it is particularly necessary that there should be difficulties in religion, more than in other matters. The things are divine, the understandings are human; and is it to be wondered that God's thoughts are above ours? If (as we have seen in the foregoing particular) we have a most imperfect knowledge even of sensible objects, which continually lie before us; how is it possible that we should be acquainted with *the deep things of God*, which the *angels themselves desire to look into*? Hardly (as the wise man elegantly observes) *we guess aright at things that are upon earth, and with labour do we find the things that are before us; but the things that are in heaven who hath searched out?* (Wisd. ix. 16.) How can we think it hard that the Trinity and incarnation should be mysterious, since they belong to the divine nature, which is in itself mysterious, even setting aside those doctrines; and would have been so, if those doctrines had never been revealed? For I would willingly ask the man who declares he has no notion of three persons in the Godhead, what notion he has of a self-existent, eternal, infinite being? Of a being which never begun, and never shall end; which had itself no cause, and is the cause of every thing, but itself? I would ask such a man, I say, whether he fully understands

understands these things; and whether his ideas (to use the terms in which he so much rejoices) be so very clear, distinct, and adequate? And yet that there is, that there must be, an infinite eternal Being, or there could never have been any being at all, is no less than demonstration: which many of those who deny the Trinity do readily acknowledge; though they altogether as little comprehend the manner of the one, as of the other. That there is a God we demonstrate by reason; but how he is we know not: that there is a Trinity we prove from scripture; but how it is we know not: and why this should involve more absurdity or difficulty than that, I am not able to comprehend. Upon the same foundation then that they deny the Three Persons, they may as well deny the One God: there is the same reason for both; that is to say, no reason for either.

In these points therefore of the Trinity and incarnation, the subject is the nature of God; which in all views will to us be ever incomprehensible: and consequently it is no wonder there should be mysteries concerning it. For how can it be conceived that a finite should comprehend an infinite? And how then can human understanding comprehend the Divine nature? What the advocates of Popery therefore urge upon this subject, to justify their monstrous doctrine of transubstantiation, is almost as absurd as that doctrine itself. You believe some mysteries, say they; and why not others? why not transubstantiation, as well as the Trinity? We answer; 1st, Because the one is very frequently and plainly revealed in scripture, the other not at all. 2^{dly}, Because the one is not contradictory either to reason, or our senses; the other is contradictory to both. In the doctrine of the Trinity it is not said that three are one, speaking of the same thing, or respect; not that three persons are one person, or three Gods one God; which would be a contradiction indeed; but that three persons are one God, or (which is the same, though more plainly expressed) that in the unity of the Godhead three persons are included; which is no contradiction, nor any thing like it. But it is a thorough one, to say that the same thing at the same time can be above, and below itself; or that the same finite thing can be

in all places at once. But the answer which more particularly relates to our present purpose, is this: in the latter instance, the subject before us is not only a finite being, but an object of our senses; the outward qualities of which we so plainly perceive, and know, that if we cannot be sure of these things we can be sure of nothing; but in the former, the subject of our thoughts is the nature of God, which, let us take it how we will, is infinite, invisible, incomprehensible; and consequently it is no wonder that there should be mysteries concerning it.

Must we not then understand what we believe? I answer; it is necessary to apprehend it, but not to comprehend it; or, in other words, to know something of it, but not every thing. For if the latter were necessary, it would follow that we know nothing: there being nothing in nature (as I above observed) that we fully understand. And to believe a thing upon God's word, though we do not fully understand it, is so far from being a hardship upon us; that we continually yield such an assent to one another. In all studies, arts, and sciences, nothing is more usual, nor indeed more rational, than to consult those who are reputed to be skilled in them: and upon their authority we are satisfied that such a particular point is as they say; though we ourselves are not able to prove, and do not clearly understand it.

But still it is urged that we ought at least to understand the terms of the proposition to which we assent: and so we do; as well in this case, as in many others; not only in philosophy, but in things of a less abstracted nature. The words, One and Three, it is to be hoped, are plain enough; nor is the term God more difficult here, than any where else: the main quarrel therefore is at the word Person; which indeed has been the subject of much impertinent wrangling. And yet let any man sincerely ask himself, whether he has not as clear an idea annexed to that word, as to many others which he continually uses, not only in the sciences, but in common discourse? I say, as clear, for it is not pretended that it is entirely so. But then that doctrine which has been advanced by some, that we cannot rationally assent to any thing, unless our ideas are perfectly clear, adequate, and distinct, is a most false

false assertion; as appears by experience to all who reflect upon the workings and operations of their own minds: which will inform them that they yield an assent, and that a most reasonable one too, even when their notions are confuse, inadequate, and obscure; and indeed if it were otherwise it would follow that we can know nothing, unless we knew all things. The reason why we make use of the word person in this article of our faith, is very plain, *viz.* because personal attributes are in scripture perpetually ascribed to the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost distinctly; and because that very word is used upon this occasion by the inspired writer; who styles the Son *the brightness of his Father's glory, and the express image of his person.* (Heb. i. 3.)

The truth is, it may very well be admired that these doctrines of the Trinity and incarnation have in all ages of the gospel embroiled the Christian world so much as they have done: when in reality there is, with respect to our faith, no material difficulty about them. I say with respect to our faith; for that they are hard, nay by us impossible to be explained, we readily acknowledge. But that we cannot explain a mystery, is one thing; that we cannot rationally believe it, is another: and though we may not fully understand what we believe; yet we may fully understand why we believe. And that is the very case now before us. The points we are upon are as plainly delivered in the scriptures, as any thing in them: and that we do not thoroughly comprehend them, is no reasonable objection; because (as I observed before) in our common intercourse among one another we continually believe things even upon human testimony, which we do not understand: and it is very hard if God's word will not go as far with us as man's.

Nor are the doctrines we have been considering, purely speculative, as our pretended free thinkers love to call them: though if they were, that would be nothing to the purpose, since they are revealed by God as the objects of our faith; and if it be his pleasure that we believe some things of a speculative nature, how dare we dispute it? But besides, I say, these points are not purely speculative; they are in a great measure practical; they have a direct relation to our practice; and if they have not as direct an

influence upon it, the fault is our own. From them we may prove the infinite malignity of sin, and God's irreconcilable hatred to it; since no less a propitiation than that of his only-begotten Son, uniting his divine nature with our human, could satisfy his justice and put us in a capacity of salvation: and if this be not a practical point, and that too of the utmost moment imaginable, I know not what to call so.

But still we are told by some, that the vulgar, and the most ignorant and illiterate persons have souls to be saved, as well as the learned; and therefore if these things were necessary to be believed, they would be plain and easy to the meanest capacity. This they frequently urge: and they may with just the same reason insist upon it, that all men ought to be born mathematicians, philosophers, lawyers, and statesmen, as well as divines. The meanest capacities, if you please, ought to be, and may be, instructed in every thing they are concerned to know; but it is not necessary they should know it of themselves; or if they did, I believe there would be no great difference between the meanest capacity, and the greatest. They are to be taught, if you please; and there is a particular order of men set apart by Almighty God to teach them: and that sure is sufficient; but that they should understand every thing in the scriptures by their own proper lights, and that too at first reading, is by no means absolutely requisite.

But after all that has been, or can be, said; some will insist upon it, that Christianity is in no part mysterious: and yet we have shewn, that every thing else is so in some respect or other; and why religion alone should be excepted, is itself a mystery. The truth is, those men who are so irreconcilable to these difficult doctrines, make the gospel in general ten times more difficult than those doctrines: by denying all mysteries in any part, they make an entire mystery of the whole: for in faith, as well as practice, we may *strain at a gnat, and swallow a camel*; which indeed is the case of the persons of whom we are now speaking. They cannot admit of the Trinity and incarnation; though asserted in scripture over and over, as plainly as words can be spoken; and though (as I said) those points relate to the Divine nature,

nature, which itself is incomprehensible. But they can digest a thousand gross absurdities in expounding away the plain meaning of the many texts in which those points are delivered: they have no notion of an unintelligible doctrine, but a very good one of an unintelligible gospel: they require of us a determinate meaning in our words, but will not allow their Saviour to have any meaning at all in his; unless it be to mean just contrary to what he speaks. These are the men of criticism; so regular in their thinking, and so exact in their language; who by denying the honour due to their Redeemer as God, endeavour to make him appear like an impostor as man.

To object therefore against Christianity, upon the account of some difficulties in it, is most unreasonable and injurious. Since the main proofs and substance of it are sufficiently easy; we must not conclude from particular difficulties contained in the holy scriptures, but from the main drift and tendency of them; and believe the whole, though we do not understand every part. We should proceed upon the irrefragable evidences which demonstrate the scriptures in general to be the word of God: when that is done, all other difficulties vanish of course, or at least are easily surmounted by that over-ruling consideration. Both in matters of faith and practice, we ought not to argue thus; Such or such a thing is reasonable, therefore God has probably revealed it: but thus; God has certainly revealed it, and therefore it is reasonable; and whether it seem so to us, or no, it ought to be believed, or obeyed. This is the truest way of arguing; because we have sufficient and uncontested evidence of what he has revealed; far better than we have, in these cases, to convince us that we are right in our judgments concerning what is, or is not, agreeable to reason. And then we are very sure of these two things; that it is rational to obey, and believe God, whatever he commands, or asserts; and that God cannot impose upon us any thing irrational. The only questions to the purpose therefore in the case before us are these; Is such or such a thing in the scriptures? Is this or that the meaning of it? and are not the scriptures the word of God? All besides these, are idle and impious enquiries. Here indeed

I am sensible that many little objections, or cavils rather, are made about the scriptures themselves; about the trivial matters, obscure texts, repetitions, incoherencies, various readings, different senses, seeming inconsistencies, and the like, contained in them: all which have been fully answered an hundred times over. Or if they were not; it would be sufficient to reply in general, that still the Bible is demonstrated to be the word of God, which these objections do not in the least disprove; it being already shewn at large under this head, that the divine authority of the scriptures being once established, the difficulties they contain are no argument against them. Nay, there are very good reasons to be given why there should be some obscurities in religion; and they are so far from being an argument against it, that they are a confirmation of it. Which was the third and last thing I proposed to consider, under this third general head.

And here we must premise this one observation; that we might be very well satisfied about these matters, even though we could not any way account for them; because God has most certainly a reason for all he does and says, whether we can assign one, or no.

But besides, we can give very good reasons for the difficulties of which I am discoursing; among which I shall mention but these four: *viz.* That these difficulties are of great use:

1. To try our faith.
2. To mortify our vanity.
3. To engage our reverence. And,
4. To engage our attention.

1. First then, it is the most reasonable thing in the world, that God should put our faith to some sort of test; that we may prove whether we heartily and sincerely believe him, and depend upon him, or no. He did so with Abraham, and that in a much higher instance than this we are now mentioning: it was a far more severe trial upon him to sacrifice his son, than it is upon us to sacrifice our folly and presumption; much harder for him to destroy his only beloved child, than for us to believe, upon God's word, what we do not perfectly understand. This however is some degree of proof, some sort of resignation to the wisdom and authority of God; though it must indeed be confessed, that there is not

not here so much virtue in yielding our assent, as sin in refusing it.

2. The difficulties we are considering, are of great use to mortify our vanity; to *put us in mind that we are but men* (Psal. ix. 20.) and that by the frame of our finite and limited capacities, it is impossible we should understand all things. In this respect therefore God deals with us as he did with his people of old: the glory of the Lord appears, but still it is in a cloud; in some measure, I mean, though not so much now as it was then. He shews us both the bright and the dark side of things; the one to instruct, and the other to humble us. We *know enough to make us wise unto salvation* (2 Tim. iii. 15.), and so have no reason to complain; and are ignorant of enough to make us reflect upon our weakness, and so have no reason to be proud. And sure it is most rational that it should be so; nay impossible it should be otherwise; unless we would suppose men to be gods; or *as gods, knowing good and evil* (Gen. iii. 5.), meaning all of both. Whereas, in truth, the only way to know good and evil, really, properly, and as we should do, in order to our happiness, is not to pretend to be as gods, or, in other words, to be omniscient.

3. These obscurities in religion and the scriptures, are of use to engage our reverence. This indeed, according to the nature of the thing, may seem superfluous. For since these oracles are divine, that consideration alone may appear sufficient to excite our veneration: But according to the nature of ourselves, which is corrupt and degenerate, all means are few enough to make us virtuous; and small ones have sometimes more influence upon us than great ones. The darkest part therefore of religion may serve to engage our reverence to the whole: as temples were anciently built in groves; and before there were any temples at all, groves were the places of divine worship; that their shade and gloominess might strike a religious awe, or a kind of sacred horror, into the worshippers. And we all know that nothing excites our reverence to sovereign princes, more than this consideration, that though their majesty in part be visible to us, yet it is partly concealed; and though some of their counsels be discovered to us, (as much as is needful for us to know, with

regard to our duty and obedience) yet others are kept secret; and it would be the utmost folly and presumption in us to be curious or inquisitive concerning them.

4. The last use of these difficulties which I named, is to engage our study and attention. For very many of them, nay the greatest part, are (as I observed) very capable of being explained, and fully understood by labour and application: and even those which are not so are the proper objects of our study; though not to explain them, yet to consider what, and how much, we are required to believe concerning them. And can any thing be more reasonable, than that the oracles of God, though sufficiently clear in the main, should be so difficult and obscure, as to keep our minds earnest and intent in reading, to hinder them from slackening or unbending, to employ our industry in searching the scriptures; the discoveries which we make more than rewarding the pains we bestow in our search after them?

To these reasons, which are very plain, might be added another, as (at least) highly probable; *viz.* That many things in the inspired writings are hidden from us here on earth, that we may have the pleasure and happiness of discovering them in heaven. This is extremely congruous in its own nature, and agreeable to the constant method and tenor of God's proceeding with the children of men: which has always been to make gradual manifestations of himself; as he did first to the ancient patriarchs, by his revelations and precepts before the flood; then, to the people of the Jews, by the law and the prophets; and lastly, to all mankind, by the more glorious light of the gospel.

That there should be these difficulties therefore being, upon all these accounts, so agreeable to reason; they are so far from being an argument against our religion, that they are a confirmation of it: which was what I undertook to prove.

IV. I proceed now, in the fourth place, to remark upon that part of the character of the persons here mentioned by the Apostle; that they wrest these difficulties to their own destruction, and are wicked, as well as foolish, in so doing.

Our blessed Saviour observes, that *men love darkness rather than light, because their deeds*

eds are evil. (John iii. 19.) In pursuance of which remark we may take notice, that they love doubts rather than certainty; because their wills are perverse, and their understandings confused. What can be more foolish than to chuse to be always tottering, when it is in our own power to stand upon firm ground? I say it is in our own power; for (as I have fully shewn) the main proofs and points of religion are sufficiently plain; and upon them we may insist, if we think fit: nor is there any occasion of tormenting ourselves with the inscrutable things of God, whose nature is incomprehensible, whose judgments are unsearchable, and whose ways are past finding out. What folly to make our heads giddy by shivering upon precipices, and looking down into the ocean; when we may, if we please, walk upon an even surface with safety and delight? We may, nay we ought, to enquire; but let it be into things which we are capable of understanding; not into points, of which we are sure we can never be satisfied. We may attempt to fathom depths; but let them not be such, as we are certain exceed the length of our line: we may endeavour to explain difficulties; but not those which by the nature of the things compared with our understandings, we may know to be inexplicable. Nor is it at all difficult to know which are so, and which are not. One rule we may take for infallible; that whenever infinite is the object of our speculations, we may depend upon it our researches are vain, and our satisfaction impossible. Thus, for example, it always will be when we enquire into the abstracted nature of God, the Trinity, incarnation, eternal foreknowledge, predestination, and election. We ought to enquire diligently; but let it be for something which conduces to our happiness, not for science falsely so called: we ought to dig deep; but not for clay, or pebbles, but for gold, or jewels; and that too in a place where there is a probable prospect of finding them. But to cut rocks, and dig through the heart of marble, merely because it is difficult, and when we are not like to be gainers by our labour, is monstrously foolish and unreasonable. To consider the situation of such a bold enquirer's mind, is of itself sufficient to deter every thinking person from being one of the number. The

vexation and uneasiness of it is inexplicable. Such a man, instead of walking in the smooth flowery paths of virtue, which are the plain doctrines and duties of religion, is ever hampered and intangled in the briers and thorns of hard questions, in the intricate mazes and labyrinths of dispute. How foolish is it thus to neglect the easy and obvious means of salvation, to amuse ourselves with the difficult and inexplicable points of Christianity; when we are on every side encompassed with such dangers, as demand our utmost care and vigilance to avoid them! This is just as if a man in a tempest at sea should, instead of using the necessary means to save his life, entertain himself and the company by gravely philosophizing upon the nature of winds and hurricanes; which, after all too, with his utmost sagacity, he is not able to explain. And this leads us to consider further the exceeding guilt, folly, and danger of this speculation, with respect to our everlasting interest in another world.

This will abundantly appear, if we do but reflect upon the causes from whence it proceeds: which are either pride and obstinacy; or disaffection to religion in general; or at best, a light, petulant, and capricious temper. One, and indeed the chief parent of heresies and heterodoxy, is pride; that peculiar, and most distinguishing quality of the devil; that quality, which was the original cause of his apostasy and destruction. Vain-glory, and a mighty opinion of their own sufficiency, puts men upon the folly of being ambitious to be thought discoverers and inventors of some new thing; men above the common level, of a more raised and penetrating genius than ordinary. Thus the first heretick, Simon Magus, gave out that *himself was some great one* (Acts viii. 9.): and his successors in all ages have generally proceeded upon the same principle. Now the difficult and obscure places of scripture are always the ground for these impostors to act their part upon. Like witches, and demons, they love the dark; and like them too, if they continue obstinate, will meet with their reward in outer darkness. As for those who wrest the *things hard to be understood*, out of ill will to religion in general; the case is so very plain, and their guilt so horrid, that there is no occasion of insisting upon it. But to suppose the best, even those in whom

whom it proceeds from a light, capricious, and petulant temper, are in very great danger; and even in them it has a tendency to fatal consequences. It unsettles the understanding, leads to a variety of errors, false doctrines, and damnable heresies; and unfixes the common principles even of religion in general. This is so plain from what has been said; that we need not enlarge upon the consideration of it. The influence and importance of faith are sufficiently known: and how the folly I am discoursing of tends to weaken our faith, is no less evident. I proceed therefore in the

V. Fifth and last place to enforce the exhortation of the Apostle; that we may not be led away by this error of the wicked, or fall from our own steadfastness. It is matter of common observation, as well as agreeable to reason, and the nature of things, that those who have deceived themselves, are always apt to deceive others: and the difficulties and obscurities of religion are the main argument they insist upon. How weak, absurd, and irrational that argument is, I have abundantly shewn in this discourse. What remains is to caution those who are in danger of being deluded by it. And here it is to be observed, that some even well-disposed persons are apt to pass rash censures upon the obscure places of scripture, and to talk very foolishly, if not profanely, upon these occasions: which in them proceeds purely from thoughtlessness, and want of consideration. Let such be warned to reflect upon the dangerous tendency of that folly, as I have largely represented it: and let those who are at the farthest distance from it, take the advice of the Apostle in my text; *Seeing they know these things before, let them beware lest they also, being led away by the error of the wicked, fall from their own steadfastness.* Which last expression is very emphatically, and very properly, opposed to the word *unstable*, in the former part of the text. The tendency of thus amusing ourselves with *things hard to be understood*, is (as we have observed) to unsettle our minds, and to possess them with a habit of levity and trifling: and of what importance it is to act upon a scheme of fixed and settled principles; how pernicious and destructive to be in a maze of confused ideas, without a determinate train of thinking; is too mani-

fest, to need any proof or explication. To strengthen therefore and confirm what I have urged, I shall only farther observe two things, which are of the utmost moment in themselves, as well as material to our present purpose.

1. It must be ever remembered, that the difficulties we have been considering would not be at all complained of, were it not for difficulties of another kind; I mean those which we meet with in the practical part of religion. People's understandings would be well enough satisfied, were not their wills perverse; and their heads would be clear, if their hearts were clean. The precepts of Christianity are directly levelled against the bent of our corrupt nature; and require us to renounce our most darling sins; though the operation be as painful as cutting off a hand, or plucking out an eye. And *hinc illæ lacrimæ*: these are the difficulties: the complaint is only against the others, the quarrel is against these. It is not from the mysteries of Christianity, but from the mystery of iniquity, that all these objections proceed. We should hear no objections about original sin, were not eternal damnation denounced upon our actual ones: the enemies of religion would make no exceptions against the doctrines of the Trinity, and incarnation, were it not for the doctrines of self-denial and mortification: these latter make them enemies to religion; and then their business is to raise all the cavils which their wit and scepticism can muster against it.

2. It is carefully to be observed, that the way to understand what we do not know in religion, is to practise according to what we do know: by obeying the precepts of the gospel (which are all plain and intelligible) we shall have the fairest probability of being by degrees let into its secrets: and this we are assured of, from the natural tendency of things, and from the promises of holy Scripture. The regularity of our lives clears and enlarges the intellectual faculties: the farther we proceed in goodness, the more light will gradually break in upon us: *the path of the just (as the wise man teaches us) is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day.* (Prov. iv. 24.) The scriptures are to be studied with our hearts, as well as heads; with the will and affections, as well as with the understanding.

standing. *The natural man* (as the Apostle assures us) *receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.* (1 Cor. ii. 14.) An observation extremely remarkable, and very seriously and frequently to be considered by us; though in fact it seems to be but little regarded. When we are habitual in the practice of virtue, we may with confidence use the prayer of the inspired writer; *Open thou mine eyes, that I may see the wonderful things of thy law;* (Psal. cxix. 18.) i. e. understand the more abstruse and difficult points of religion. But how can it be reasonably expected, that the prophane should be admitted into the holy of holies; or that those who are in the pollutions of sin should be acquainted with the venerable secrets of the gospel? *The secret of the Lord is with them that fear him; and he will shew them his covenant* (Psal. xxv. 14.): these are the persons to be admitted into the more retired oracles of God, into the sacred recesses of divine inspiration. I mean, all along, so far as human understanding is capable: for it must still be remembered, that, by reason of the scantiness of our capacities, some things will be ever incomprehensible even to the best of men.

Upon the due consideration therefore of what has been offered upon this important subject, let us carefully avoid the guilt and folly mentioned in my text; and not make so pernicious a use of the *things hard to be understood*. Let us meditate upon what we know, and live according to that knowledge, without bewildering ourselves with difficulties not necessary to be explained. For that which is certain and demonstrable in Christianity is enough to find full employment for our thoughts; and is, to the last degree, both profitable, and delightful. Let us frequently consider, for example, that such a noble and excellent being, as the soul of man by experience finds herself to be, plainly superior to every thing of this sublunary world, and of a quite different nature from it, could never be designed by the infinitely wise Creator, only to spend a few years in a body, a thing entirely beneath it, and then cease to be, and vanish into nothing: that we manifestly perceive two distinct principles in ourselves, nay not

only distinct from, but contrary to each other; I mean flesh and spirit; which, with a very little deduction, argues the immortality of the latter: that thus far natural reason and experience go; but then that all this is seconded, improved, and ascertained, by revelation; which does, but close, and fall in, with those common notions of truths to which the soul naturally finds herself thus disposed. Then we are to consider, and often revolve in our minds, the irrefragable proofs and arguments which demonstrate the truth of the Christian religion, and of the holy scriptures, as also the plain necessary points both of faith and practice: and when we have done this, having thus fixed and settled the foundation, we may go on, if we please, and, if we are furnished with talents sufficient for it, examine into the difficult and obscure parts; only ever distinguishing between what we are, and what we are not capable of knowing; and ever remembering that what is necessary to be known, is either sufficiently clear of itself, or at least easy to be explained; and that, after all, some remaining difficulties are of no weight against a truth fully proved, and freed from all objections which are pretended to strike at the foundation of it. For if we are resolved to believe nothing against which some difficulties may be urged, we must then indeed believe nothing; not only in religion, but in any thing else. If we will indulge ourselves in this vain humour; we may raise objections (which indeed some have the folly to do) even against the plainest duties not only of revealed, but of natural religion. For instance, against prayer, and the worship of God: For what (say these sceptics) can our prayers signify; when the infinite perfections of the divine nature are such, that he cannot be wrought upon, so as to change his determinations for any actions of ours; which would imply weakness, and imperfection in the Supreme Being? Here, we may observe, occurs the idea of infinite; which (as I said) will ever confound and amaze us: especially, if we do not consider that our own understandings are finite. But then nothing can be more certain, than that prayer to the Supreme Being is a dictate of nature, an express command of revelation, and

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a condition of our happiness, both here, and hereafter: how it is with respect to the Infinite Being who has commanded it, is not our business to enquire; though even of that a very rational account may be given. The same cavillers may, and sometimes do, ask why the worship, praise, and adoration of God should be commanded; since he is infinitely happy and sufficient in himself, and can receive no addition to that happiness by the services of his creatures? Here again is the notion of infinite; and because we do not comprehend infinite, does it follow that God is not to be honoured and worshipped; when that he ought to be, is one of the first dictates of nature, and common sense? And yet we see, there may be objections raised even against that; as there may be indeed against any thing, even the plainest and most important principles of morality. Were we therefore, I say, to indulge ourselves in this ridiculous humour of cavilling; we might find, or make, difficulties in the most uncontestable doctrines and duties: but how absurd, as well as wicked, that would be, I leave it to any rational person to consider.

I cannot, I presume, after the cautions which I have given to the contrary, be misunderstood as endeavouring to dissuade men from a due enquiry into the points both of reason and faith; so far otherwise, that I am persuading them to it. They should only regulate their conduct in that particular, and correct their errors concerning it. For though our understandings be imperfect; yet we must not run into the other extreme, and imagine that they are useless or insignificant: as some in their rhetorical declamations against knowledge have seemed to represent them. Though we do not know every thing, we know a great deal; enough to make us happy; every thing (as the Apostle expresses it) that *pertaineth to life and godliness*: And for the rest, we may very well acquiesce in our ignorance of it. Our wisdom is to know the length of our line, and how far our sight will reach; to pray God, that in the instruction of our minds, he would (as he did in the creation of the world) divide the *light from the darkness*, and make us see the difference between the bright and shady side of things:

for next to knowing every thing, the greatest knowledge is to know what we are, and what we are not capable of knowing. To determine which, may be one use of my discourses upon this subject.

This is the only way to clear our difficulties, to be wise, good, and happy. For amidst all the obscurities of Christianity, nothing can be plainer, than that we are taught, and commanded, to *deny all ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world* (Tit. ii. 11, 12.): that religion is perfective of our nature, reducing things to their primitive and genuine order; reason to its empire, and passion to its subjection; which makes us easy in this world, and blessed in the world to come: But that a wicked life is an inversion of the order of nature, putting the subjects above their sovereign; *i. e.* the passions above reason, the flesh above the spirit, the animal and sensitive faculties above the rational and intellectual: that our vices are our tormenters and plagues, our worst of foes, the most unmerciful of tyrants: that to entertain any sin, though of never so fair and specious an outside, is to harbour a serpent in our bosom, which, if it be not timely dislodged, will infallibly sting us to death; and that whenever it entices us with the allurements of pleasure, we ought to regard it as a messenger from the devil, sent, under the appearance of friendship and love, to stab us to the heart, to drink our blood, to eat our vitals, to rob us of our peace, and quiet, our lives, and our souls; in a word, as the pest and bane of our happiness, as our most destructive and mortal enemy: that therefore we can never keep ourselves at too great a distance from it, nor too carefully avoid all approaches and tendencies towards it: and that though the pain of resisting our vicious inclinations, if they are customary and habitual, must be very great; yet that pain, even in this life, is more than recompensed by the pleasure of virtue, and a good conscience, which follows upon it; or, if it were not, it is however far better to be uneasy for a few hours, days, or years, than to be inexpressibly miserable to infinite ages. These are points in which there is no difficulty: these are things *not hard to be understood*: would to God they were

as easy to be practised, as they are to be apprehended. And to our comfort we may consider, that, as depraved as our nature is, these difficulties too, as well as those of which I have been discouraging, these in practice, as well as those in faith, are not near so difficult as they are pretended to be: 'tis but resolutely to endure the conflict for a time, and we are certain to be more than conquerors. By which means we shall at length arrive at that blessed place, where all difficulties of all kinds will be for ever removed: all perverseness and impurity from our wills; all ignorance and error from our understandings.

S E R M O N VII.

By JOHN BALGUY, M. A.

On the Excellence and Immortality of the Human Soul.

ECCLES. xii. part of the 7th verse.

And the spirit shall return unto God who gave it.

THIS chapter begins with an exhortation to youth, to season their minds with an early sense of God and their duty; that it may direct them in all their ways, and be a support and comfort to them in the declension of life. The wise preacher shews the folly of deferring the thoughts of religion, and the improvement of men's minds, to their latter days. He is so far from looking upon old age as a proper season for the accomplishment of this great work, that he represents it as scarce able to bear its own weight: and then describes, in a noble allegory, its various infirmities and gradual decays, till it terminate in death and dissolution. Next he pursues the soul and body after their separation, points out the fate and lot of both, and traces them to their respective originals. *The dust*, says he, *shall return to the earth as it was, and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it.* That is, the body shall dissolve into that earth of which it was first composed, and be incorporated with it; but the soul, being of a higher and nobler nature, will survive the separation, and return into the hands

of its Creator, to give an account of itself, and be by him treated and dealt with according to the condition and circumstances in which he shall find it. My text is therefore a plain and positive declaration of a future state; and, by probable consequence, of the perpetuity of that state; which are therefore to be the subjects of the following discourse. And what can be more worthy of our inquiry and concern? Of all questions that can possibly come under our consideration, the most important is, Whether there be not another life after this? Whether we are to die like brute beasts that have no understanding, or to live again in a future state, and exist for ever? These are points of such vast moment, such infinite consequence, that they necessarily demand every man's most serious attention. In other pursuits we may be engaged by a principle of curiosity, or the love of truth, or perhaps some particular interest: but on the resolution of these points depends our all; for so indeed it is upon the comparison. If death make an utter end of us, and we have no prospect beyond it, this life may be looked upon as a mere shadow, or a dream not worth regarding. But perhaps it will be asked, what occasion there is to examine a question that we find already determined to our hands: for does not revelation assure us of a future state? and are not *life and immortality fully brought to light in the gospel*? This is very true; but still the proofs and evidences of natural reason deserve to be considered; partly to arm our minds against the objections of unbelievers, and enable us to promote their conviction; and partly for the support and confirmation of our own faith. And indeed it cannot but give satisfaction to every rational Christian, to find that the doctrines of that revelation which he has embraced, are perfectly agreeable to the natures of things, and the reason of his own mind. Let us then briefly consider the great doctrine of a future state in this light, and see what indications, what evidence, we can discover by it. In order thereto, it will be requisite to consider—the nature of a human soul—the present condition and circumstances of mankind—and the moral perfections of our Maker. I begin with inquiring into the nature and frame of a human soul; concerning which let it be observed, in the

First place, that it plainly appears to be a simple, un compounded, indivisible substance. All matter is evidently composition; every part or parcel of it being an endless combination or heap of substances; and, by consequence, necessarily liable to dissolution and corruption: for the particles whereof it consists are always unavoidably subject to disunion and separation; and accordingly hence it comes to pass, that every system of matter is broken up in time, and sooner or later moulders away. But that the soul is not thus compounded, is manifest from all its perceptions, and all its operations; as might be shewn at large, were not such arguments too abstracted for the present occasion. The soul then being an un compounded, single substance, can admit of no division or dissolution; and from hence it clearly follows, that it is and must be incorruptible. But how incorruptible? May not God annihilate it whenever he pleases? Doubtless he may: and the same may be said of the whole creation. Whether it be probable that he will do so, is to be inquired and considered afterwards. In the mean time, we may safely conclude from the foregoing consideration, that the soul is not capable of being destroyed by second causes; which is all that the present argument pretends to prove. But,

Secondly, Another argument, drawn from the nature of the soul, is the excellence of those powers and faculties which God has given it. But having particularly considered this point in the foregoing discourse, it will be needless to resume it here, nor shall I repeat. It may be sufficient to point out, in a few words, where the force of the argument lies. Since God has endued us with intellectual and moral capacities; those great and sublime powers, which dignify our nature, and render us partakers of the divine image; it can never be supposed, with the least colour of probability, that he should confine us to the short span of this present life; and intend us, in a few years, to perish for ever. Since the soul of man is so highly exalted, and so nobly framed and furnished, it must, in all likelihood, be designed for a very different duration, as well as a more perfect state. Especially if we consider,

Thirdly, That we neither do nor can arrive in this life at that perfection, and

maturity, of which our natures are manifestly capable. All the creatures beneath us seem to attain their full perfection in their present state; I mean, to rise to the height of their respective capacities. But this appears far from being the case of human souls. Even those men that have the largest abilities, and fairest opportunities, and make the best use of them, neither do nor can accomplish their minds to the extent of their faculties. They can neither obtain that measure of knowledge, nor those degrees of virtue, nor that portion of happiness, whereof they are capable. Part of human life is spent before the first dawning of reason; and a great part of it passed before we reach any ripeness of understanding. To which may be added, the disadvantages and decays that commonly attend men in the last stage of life. And how short, how scanty, is the intermediate term for the culture of our minds, and the improvement of our faculties? Yet short as it is, a great part of it is unavoidably taken up in providing for the occasions of our bodies, and answering the demands of sense. Are we then so framed, as barely to be allowed just to taste the sweets of knowledge, and the satisfactions of truth? Are these desirable objects set before our eyes to engage our affections, and excite our longings; and as soon almost as we understand the worth of them, to be snatched away from us for ever? Was the soul formed with such large capacities, for such small improvements, and so inconsiderable a duration? Was it fitted for a perpetual progress, and an endless growth; and yet designed to be cut off, as it were, in its infancy, and perish almost at its first setting out? For, in truth, the understandings of men in this life, appear only to be in their infant state; as being doubtless capable of exceeding their present attainments, as much as the knowledge of grown men exceeds that of children. Again: The measure of man's virtues and moral graces is no less imperfect and defective, supposing him as careful and diligent about them as he ought to be; yet even on this supposition he could be no very great proficient. Considering the patterns that men have to copy after, and the perfections they have to imitate, a whole eternity may seem requisite for accomplishing their minds, and completing their

their improvements : or, to speak more properly, they can never be completed ; because they will ever be capable of further degrees, and higher advancement. Besides, we contract in our first years such an attachment to our senses and appetites, and such a fondness for their respective objects, that the remainder of our lives is seldom sufficient to disengage ourselves, and recover a right bias ; much less for arriving at a state of perfection. In short, we have so many indispositions to remove, so many disorders to rectify, so many evil habits to shake off, and so many good ones to introduce and establish ; that the best men can only be considered as beginners and probationers in virtue : so far are they from being able to perfect their natures. Can it then be supposed, that God should have ordained us only to make an entrance into the paths of wisdom and virtue, or, at the utmost, a very short and precarious progress, and then totally disappear, and drop into oblivion ! When we have just found our feet, and learned to guide our steps, must we then be struck down, to rise no more ! Can these be the fruits of our moral endeavours, and religious improvements ? No man can possibly believe it, till he have quite forgotten who it is that governs the world ; as will further appear afterwards. And since man's virtue is thus imperfect in this life, his happiness must needs be so too : for as to outward goods, they are little more than shadows of true bliss. The enjoyments of this world are empty, and unsatisfactory, as well as uncertain ; and the whole train of our pursuits is, in reality, a succession of disappointments. Such objects are not big enough to answer our faculties. *The eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear filled with hearing ;* and much less is the mind in possession of its wishes. Since then we cannot find true and solid satisfaction in this state ; since we *walk in a vain show, and disquiet ourselves in vain ;* we may hence derive just hopes of better success in another. If God created us in order to partake of the overflowings of his felicity, that end neither is, nor ever can be, effectually answered here ; where little more is allowed us than a bare glimpse of happiness, and that at a distance. And who can imagine, after we have acted, or endeavoured to act, a short part in the theatre of the world, that the great bu-

sinés of life should then be finished, and the scene shuts up for ever ?

Fourthly : Another indication appearing in the nature and frame of our minds, is that earnest desire of immortality, which so uniformly and universally prevails. A future state, and that a perpetual one, is the object of every man's wish ; his only excepted, who is so obstinately and desperately guilty, as to dread the vengeance of Heaven ; and upon that account, and that only, wishes himself out of being. And even in this case, the desire of existence is far from being extinguished. It still operates, however over-ruled by the terrors of his prospect. But to proceed : I am not supposing that the desire here spoken of was, like many others, actually planted in our minds by the Author of nature, a supposition as needless, as it seems to be groundless ; for the love of natural good being necessary and unavoidable, in order to obtain that good, the desire of existence must consequently be so too. I mean, that it must take place, whenever there is happiness in expectation : for in this case, the desire of existence necessarily results from the frame and constitution of nature. How then, or which way, does it amount to an argument of a future state ? Had the Creator implanted this desire in our minds, it might readily have been concluded that he would not fail to gratify it ; but how can such a consequence be drawn from a desire confessedly necessary ? I answer, that it is as full and forcible a proof in this case, as in the other : for to frame our minds, and fix the nature and constitution of things, in such a manner, as must necessarily produce this desire, is, in effect, the same thing as if he had actually and directly formed the desire itself. And therefore it is not to be supposed, in either case, that he should subject us to inevitable delusion and disappointment. Had he intended us nothing beyond this life, he would never have drawn us irresistibly into such false hopes, and fallacious desires. Besides ; were the necessity of this desire to be considered as absolute, and every way independent of the divine will, still the argument would hold good : for whatever is absolutely necessary, must be just and right in itself ; and, by consequence, an object of God's approbation. But,

Fifthly, That the soul of man will survive this present life, may be further argued from the strength of those benevolent affections which God has planted in it, affections that knit mankind together, and produce all the sacred ties of affinity, consanguinity, and friendship. These affections improved and heightened in virtuous characters, by a continual exchange of good offices, by real worth, mutual complacency, and reciprocal esteem, form that union of minds, that sacred tie of friendship, which adorns and dignifies our species, and contributes so highly to the honour and the happiness of human life. The root of it lies deep in our nature, and the strongest principles within us concur to lead us into it. What mean then such propensions and dispositions? And whence comes it to pass, that we are so many ways prompted to strengthen these bands, and draw them as close as possible? If this present state, where our *days are only as an hand-breadth, and our life vanisheth as a vapour*, be the whole of our existence, it must seem extremely hard to account for the principles and provisions we are speaking of. Can men be required by the impulses of nature, and the precepts of virtue, to form such close and cordial confederacies; to build up the fairest and firmest friendships, whose *foundations are in the dust*? When death divides the nearest relations, and the dearest friends, what is it that renders such a separation tolerable, and administers real support and consolation? Is it not the expectation of meeting again in another and a better world? But if this life was our all, and death our utter destruction, how dreadful, how insupportable would it be? How would it rack men's hearts to see before their eyes a total dissolution both of friend and friendship; and to find themselves just parting, never to meet more? Had therefore our Maker designed us for this life only, he would, in all probability, have given us cooler affections, and weaker attachments; and thereby have prevented the terrible anxieties above-mentioned. And indeed such strong ligaments can never be fit for creatures of so short a duration. Again: We find in our minds a powerful principle of gratitude towards benefactors; more especially our Supreme, the author and giver of all good. Him we are bound, by all the ties of nature, and reason, and

religion, to reverence and *love with all our hearts, and with all our souls*. We are every way excited, by a due contemplation of his infinite perfections, to frame the most amiable ideas of him, and to work up our minds to the highest pitch of esteem and veneration: to consider the greatness of his power, the excellence of his majesty, the depth of his wisdom, and the glory of his goodness; how many and various his benefits, how diffusive and constant his bounty; till our thoughts are filled, and our hearts enflamed, with the lustre and beauty, and grandeur, of the object; and all our faculties conspire to engage and fix us in the admiration of it. And to what end these mighty obligations and powerful attractions? Why must we exert our faculties, and raise our affections, to the highest pitch, in meditating on the Supreme Being, and admiring and adoring his boundless perfections, if, after a very imperfect acquaintance, all our hopes are at an end, and the holy flame is soon to expire, and be extinguished for ever? Could so great and important a preparation be required for any purposes of this short state? Or would our bountiful Creator bring us into being, fit us for a participation of the sovereign good, and when we had just begun to taste it, snatch us away, and reduce us to our original nothing? Had he intended us for this life only, he would rather have concealed from us, as much as possible, this glorious object, than set it before us, and draw us to it, to so very little purpose. We may safely, therefore, conclude, that such natural propensions and tendencies plainly point out another state, and can never end in frustration and disappointment. Were it otherwise, an *acquaintance with God* would be so far from yielding us peace and comfort, that it would afflict us beyond measure, and drive us into utter despair.

Sixthly, and lastly, Another proof, and that a very obvious one, arises from the suggestions of conscience; which is continually foreboding a future state, and urging it powerfully on the minds of men. It speaks so clearly and constantly in behalf thereof, and is so plain and peremptory in its declarations, that its testimony ought not to be rejected; and indeed cannot, without great violence done to the frame and constitution of our own minds. The soul of man is not only apt

to

to smart under a sense of guilt, but is also liable to secret misgivings, and painful apprehensions of what is to follow. When a man has notoriously violated the laws of Heaven, or the dictates of right reason, his conscience not only rebukes him for it, but is frequently spreading before his eyes the terrors of futurity, and the sad apprehensions of a miserable doom. On the other hand, when a man has maintained his innocence, and held fast his integrity; when he has carefully discharged his duty, and lived up to the dignity of his nature; his conscience not only applauds him for it, but cheers his heart with assurances of a future recompense, and pleasing expectations of a happy hereafter. Now, if there be no real foundation for these things; if this man's hopes, and the other man's fears, are altogether groundless and chimerical; what account is to be given of either? How came they to spread so wide, and be so deeply rooted in human nature? This argument seems equally conclusive, whether we mean by conscience merely the operation of our intellectual faculty, or an instinctive principle superadded thereto: for, upon either supposition, we are manifestly so framed, as naturally and unavoidably to fall into such a persuasion, and fix in it. Nay, when sin and wickedness have made it men's interest to shake it off, and to wish and strive against it as much as possible, they can seldom or never accomplish it. The expectation of a future state sticks fast in their minds; haunting and terrifying them, in spite of all their arts and endeavours to the contrary. Whatever means may be used, conscience is never to be quite silenced; and very often it speaks so loudly and awfully, as to startle the sinner, and makes him tremble in the midst of his vicious pursuits, and criminal enjoyments. What then can be the meaning of these natural anticipations? If there be nothing to come hereafter, how strangely is man amused, and how unaccountably misled? All appearances without him, and every principle within him, conspire to deceive him. If the grave was his utmost limit, why should he find himself under a necessity of looking beyond it? to what end were such clear prospects opened, and such strong expectations kindled? by what strange fate is he compelled to *walk in a vain*

show, and disquiet himself in vain? But the truth is, such a supposition is destitute of all manner of foundation; as being directly repugnant both to the nature of God and man; as will further appear hereafter. Whatever conscience presages, whatever uncorrupted reason suggests, may securely be relied on, and considered as the voice of him, who can never disappoint his creatures, or falsify those expectations which he has given them. And indeed it is impiety to suppose, that Infinite Wisdom cannot govern the world without the help of fallacy and fiction.

This argument, drawn from natural conscience, will appear yet stronger, if we consider the extent and universality of it. It is not a notion or an impulse that prevails here and there; at some certain times, and some particular parts of the world; the voice of it has been heard in all ages, and in all nations, and its convictions spread over the face of the whole earth: scarce an exception to be found even among the most uncivilized and barbarous people. There is, indeed, and has been all along, a great difference in men's ideas of a future state, according to the lights received among them, and the degrees of their improvement; but the doctrine itself, in some dress or other, has universally prevailed. Which plainly shews it to be, in the strictest sense of the word, natural; as arising from the frame and constitution of our minds, and the genuine principles of humanity. Was it not founded on nature, and perfectly agreeable to unprejudiced reason, how should it ever be so deeply rooted in the minds of men? even of the best and wisest men, in a more peculiar manner; and those too destitute of supernatural light, and the benefit of revelation. This consideration may be justly accounted a strong presumption in behalf of the doctrine before us. For certainly it would be very strange, if men's minds were so framed and turned, that even the wisest and worthiest of them should naturally run into such sentiments concerning this matter, as had no foundation in truth or nature. What should give mankind such an invincible bias to error, such an universal tendency to delusion? The more we consider these things, the more we shall be at a loss to give any account of

them, but what either supposes, or must terminate in, the truth and reality of a future state.

S E R M O N VIII.

The same Subject continued.

ECCLES. xii. part of the 7th verse.

And the spirit shall return unto God who gave it.

IN a former discourse on these words, I proposed to consider briefly the proofs and evidences of a future state, arising from natural reason; and began with those arguments which are plainly deducible from the frame and constitution of our own minds. This head being then dispatched, what now remains to be inquired into, is the present condition and circumstances of mankind, considered relatively and in connection with the known attributes and perfections of the Deity. I shall give a short account of each, as far as our subject is concerned; and, having laid down the facts, produce the argument, and point out the conclusion, which naturally flows from them.

As to the present condition and circumstances of mankind, the fact is plainly as follows: We find from daily experience, and general observation, that there is no regular distribution of good and evil in this life: in many respects, *all things come alike to all, and there is one event to the righteous and to the wicked.* Though virtue naturally tends to happiness, and vice is naturally productive of misery, yet in this world neither of these effects constantly happens: many things concurring to hinder both the one and the other. We see that good men are exposed to various hardships and misfortunes; which, on numberless occasions, they are forced to undergo. So far they oftentimes are from being happy, as might be hoped and expected, that they are deeply distressed, and greatly miserable; so far from reaping the proper fruits of their virtue, as to suffer like evil-doers, and be compassed about with a sad variety of wretchedness. Nay, it has too often happened, that their very virtue has been the occasion of their sufferings, and the accidental cause of all their calamities. On the other hand,

wicked men often prosper and flourish in the midst of their iniquities; not only escaping the forementioned hardships, but abounding in all the pleasures and enjoyments of life. Nay, their very wickedness is sometimes the occasion of their prosperity; and a great part of their lives is perhaps a continued scene of successful vice and triumphant villany. All ages and countries abound in instances of both these kinds, and the observation is familiar and common among men—so promiscuously and irregularly are good and evil dispensed here below! And indeed this has been at all times so remarkable, that many ill-advised men have rashly taken occasion from hence to call in question either Divine Providence, or the Divine Perfections: but on very weak grounds, as will be seen afterwards.

In the mean time, however difficult it may have been to account for the providential dispensations of this life, most certain it is, that God's moral character is, and must be, perfectly clear and unspotted, he necessarily approves virtue, and disapproves vice, because the one is essentially amiable, and the other absolutely odious in its own nature. Conformably hereto, he is perpetually directed by the sacred rule of truth and moral fitness in all his proceedings, and in all his dealings with his creatures. A Being of infinite wisdom must, at all times, infallibly act according to the reasons of things, and the right of every case, because there is always a motive, a powerful motive, for so doing, arising from the intrinsic worth and excellence of such actions; and because, on the other hand, there can be no possible motive to induce God, on any occasion, to deviate from this divine rule.—Frail man indeed is very much governed by affections and passions, and those, alas! often irregular; but his Maker, being entirely void of all affection, can only be influenced by reason and rectitude; from which there is nothing to withdraw him, and to which he is therefore immoveably attached. The consequence of which is, the perfect righteousness of his government, and the inviolable equity of all his dispensations.—Two other particulars relating to our subject I shall only just mention, as being universally acknowledged and understood: the one is, that God is privy

to our whole conduct, and intimately acquainted with all our thoughts, words, and actions; and the other, that the lot and condition of every creature is altogether dependent on him; good and evil being lodged in his hands, and his power of dispensing them absolute and uncontrollable.—These truths being premised, I shall now endeavour to shew how we are to argue from them, in order to a clear and satisfactory proof of the great point before us: and here we shall find, that, supposing our souls to perish with our bodies, the whole scene of things here below is utterly unaccountable, and indeed directly repugnant to the moral perfection of the Deity.

If then virtue be in itself really better and more deserving than vice, it undeniably follows, that good men have a better title to favour than wicked men; their conduct being intrinsically more amiable and meritorious. And that virtue is really thus preferable, is, to all intelligent beings, as evident as the difference between light and darkness: and if to all intelligent beings, much more to the Supreme, whose eye is perfectly pure, and his judgment unprejudiced and infallible. Virtue therefore is secure of his approbation; and, by consequence, virtuous men of his favour: for goodness in the action is desert in the agent; and desert in the agent is a title that can never possibly be rejected by an all-righteous Governor. There can be no better or stronger reason given, why God should favour one man, and discountenance another, than that the one is virtuous, and the other vicious. Nay, if our ideas may be trusted, it is the only one that can finally have any weight with so perfect a judge. Most certain therefore it is, that God will treat men accordingly; judging them according to their works, and distinguishing the righteous from the wicked in a most signal manner; conformably to moral truth, and the eternal reasons of things. This, I say, will most assuredly be done at some time or other. But it is not done in this life, as we have already observed and acknowledged; and therefore there will certainly be another. Since at present the wicked frequently prosper, and the righteous fall into distress, contrary to the deserts of the one, and the demerits of the other; it plainly follows, that

there must and will be a future state, to adjust this irregularity, and rectify the disorders occasioned by it. Without question, God has wise reasons for dispensing good and evil promiscuously in this world; and some of them we know: but without a future state, he could have none at all. Nay, such a proceeding would, in that case, be directly repugnant to all the reason in the world. Was there to be no life hereafter, every man would undoubtedly be happy or unhappy here in proportion to his virtues or vices. All the events and dispensations of Providence, would turn upon this hinge, and the blessings of Heaven be distributed by this rule. But since we find it in fact very much otherwise, the doctrine before us seems as clear and certain, as that God *loveth righteousness and hateth iniquity*.

Here perhaps it may be alleged, that the best men, notwithstanding their virtues, have transgressed more or less, and are therefore sinners in the sight of God: that upon this account they have no right to complain of their present hardships and sufferings, supposing these sufferings not to exceed the proportion of their demerits. To this I answer, that however this allegation may serve to stop the mouths, and silence the murmurs, of unhappy men, it no way affects the argument before us; which is drawn from the moral perfection of the Deity, and that rule of righteousness by which he must necessarily be supposed to proceed in all his dispensations. The best men, we are told, have failed and fallen short of their duty, and are therefore justly punishable at any time. Be it so. But have not wicked men failed and offended much more; and therefore deserved much greater punishment? Supposing then no future state, how comes it to pass, that they are not punished, constantly punished, in this world, in proportion to their demerits? If the former be just and fit, do we not plainly see that the latter is much more so? To execute sentence speedily on good men, because they have sometimes erred and done amiss, and at the same time quite overlook the crimes of notorious sinners, is impossible to be reconciled with any idea of moral truth. Whatever reason be assigned for the immediate punishment of those delinquents who are least guilty, must needs hold much stronger in respect of those who are most

most guilty: and therefore, excluding a life to come, no wicked man would ever have prospered in this. And the reason is, because a righteous and perfect Governor can never act arbitrarily, or capriciously; but will always follow the rule of equity, and the right of the case. It must indeed be confessed, that in very many cases, we cannot presume to judge of the grounds and reasons of the Divine conduct; but in the present case, they are so plain, and clear, and cogent, that if there be any truth in our faculties, and virtue and vice be real things, there is no room for doubt, or the least suspicion of error. God will assuredly manifest his righteousness in the most public manner, and redress the confusions of this present life.

Should it be further urged, that the sufferings of the righteous are compensated by that serenity of mind, and self-satisfaction which their virtues affords them; and that therefore there is no occasion for a future state to make them amends; the answer is, as follows: It is indeed readily granted, that virtue is always amiable, always beneficial, in its own nature; and would be greatly so in favourable conditions and circumstances. But in the case we are speaking of, its principal comforts vanish, and the enjoyment of it dwindles to almost nothing. Supposing a man both virtuous and prosperous, he could not be accounted happy, had he no prospect beyond the grave. Neither outward advantages, nor inward improvements, could avail him much, if he stood so near the brink of destruction, and expected so soon a total dissolution both of soul and body. But this is not the case before us; we are speaking of a good man very unhappy in this world, and deeply distressed; surrounded with griefs and calamities, and perhaps his whole life a continued scene of sorrow and tribulation. Here then the question is, whether, without a future state, his virtue be able to make him ample amends for all his sufferings; to heal the wounds of misfortune, and support him sinking under a load of adversity? Alas! this is so far from being the truth of his case, that he is almost entirely disqualified to receive any enjoyment, or any comfort from his virtue. Extremity of pain and grief will admit of no comfort but what beams from above.

And if the windows of Heaven were quite shut, what could a good man, in such a condition, do more, than sit down disconsolate, and abandoned to sorrow and despair? But is not virtue, in itself, fair, and lovely, and full of charms? True; but he is not at leisure, not in a condition, to attend to them: and if he was, the more lovely he found it, the more it would grieve him to think, that he had no hopes of living to enjoy it; excepting the poor remainder of a short and precarious life. Can then a righteous God leave virtuous men thus destitute, or bring them into the world for such a purpose as this? Impossible. Such a proceeding appears quite inconsistent even with human goodness; much more with divine.

But further: It may deserve to be considered, that part of our species are cut off before they are capable of either contracting guilt, or even knowing the difference between vice and virtue. Among these, doubtless there are some whose portion of evil exceeds their good; whose little lives are almost filled up with pain, and suffering, and lamentation. Now if these hardships are to be made up abundantly in another life, there is no difficulty at all in the case. But, supposing no future state, it seems not only difficult, but utterly impossible, to be accounted for; since, on this supposition, their very existence is a calamity, an injury, a curse. It is not conceivable, that the all-wise and all-perfect Creator should produce any beings in vain; much less, that he should produce them for such an end as is worse than none at all. I will not presume to say, that the communication of good is the sole end of the creation; but one end, one chief end, we plainly perceive it must have been: and therefore we may be assured, that no creatures can be sent into the world with a quite contrary view; neither can any be treated, without any demerit of their own, so hardly and rigorously, as to give just cause for doubting of such a conclusion. If then the foregoing case be really fact, as cannot I think be denied, or disputed, it affords, of itself, an unanswerable proof of a future state: and, if among the adult part of mankind, there are, or have been, any so innocent and good, and yet so unhappy and wretched, that their sufferings have exceeded the proportion

portion of their demerits; the same consequence will follow, and every such instance will yield an irresistible argument for the truth of that doctrine which we have been considering. For most certain it is, that God can never ordain any man to suffer more than he has deserved, without making him full reparation either here, or hereafter.

Thus then we may safely and justly argue from the present condition and circumstances of mankind; which, without a future state, are plainly repugnant to the Divine attributes; though, with a future state, as plainly and perfectly agreeable thereto: for, admitting such a state, the unequal and irregular distributions of this life are easily solved, and readily accounted for. Nay, they become not only intelligible, but manifestly convenient, suitable, and fit; as directly conducing to prepare mankind for such a state, by a fuller exercise and improvement of every virtue. For a life to come, it may be, and is, highly fitting, that we be trained and tutored here in a state of discipline and probation. Human virtue may require, in order to its perfection and our happiness, that it be thus tried, prepared, and purified: and different minds may require different trials, and various dispensations. On which account we have no reason to wonder, when we find good men in great distress; this being perhaps no more than what is necessary to form an exalted character; to produce more illustrious virtue, and triumphant merit. To *strangers* and *pilgrims*, seeking a better country, and travelling to their appointed home, no difficulties or distresses on the road can seem either unnatural, or intolerable; especially, when they have the pleasure and the encouragement to know that their own final advantage will be thereby promoted. Since then our condition and circumstances here below, are no other than what might be expected, supposing a future state, this may be looked on as a further presumption of the reality of such a state. And thus our present life will be considered, what it really is, a nursery for the next; where we are to be properly educated, and carefully disciplined, for a more durable and blissful state. But, on the other hand, if we exclude futurity, and give up all our hopes and pretensions beyond the grave;

this present life becomes, in the eyes of thinking men, all darkness, discomfort, and perplexity; a sad scene of desperate disorder, and inextricable confusion. This, I have shewn, can never be the case of mankind, while they are under the government of Infinite Wisdom and Goodness. Upon the whole, whether we consider the nature and condition of man, or the nature and perfections of his Maker, we find plain indications, and solid proofs, of the important doctrine now before us.

What remains to be considered is, whether or no the future state here treated of will be of perpetual duration. It does not indeed necessarily follow, that because the soul survives the body, therefore it must exist for ever. For doubtless it must always be in the Creator's power to put a period to its existence; and therefore its immortality entirely depends on his good will and pleasure: and if this will has been revealed, as God be thanked it has, it must needs be peculiarly fitting to have recourse to that revelation, as will be observed afterwards. However, at present, let us go on with the evidence of natural reason; which, even as to this point, deserves our attention. Since then God is pleased to prolong the soul's existence after death, and provide for it another state, as appears from a great variety of proofs; it follows from thence, with high degrees of probability, that he will always continue its being, and suffer it to enjoy that immortality which seems to be the privilege of its nature. The force of that argument, which we have just examined, concerning the sufferings of the innocent, and the adversities of the righteous, does not indeed extend thus far; because another life of a limited duration may undoubtedly be sufficient to compensate both. Nevertheless we have, even from reason, good grounds to hope that our next life will be unlimited and endless. I shall content myself at present with mentioning these two things: First, that as far as our ideas reach, no good reason can be assigned, why God should interpose to prevent the immortality of the soul; nothing of this sort having ever been urged, or produced, with the least appearance or colour of probability. And, secondly, good reasons may be assigned for the contrary supposition. The ends
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of the creation, as far as we know them, are confessedly the glory of God, and the good and happiness of his creatures. Now the longer good men are suffered to exist in an happy state, the more they must needs be blessed, and God be glorified: and by the perpetuation of such a state, we plainly perceive that the same great ends will be promoted for ever. But, further: These reasons against annihilation will not only eternally hold good, but be continually gathering new force and strength. The longer virtuous men live, in such a state, the fitter they must be for life; and therefore we may presume, the less will be the danger of extinction. Their faculties must grow, their capacities enlarge, and all their improvements increase, through every part of duration. Great advances must be ever made in knowledge, and virtue, and happiness. They must be continually more and more capable of contemplating, admiring, and enjoying the Author of all good, and the Fountain of all perfection. To imagine, after this progress, and these exaltations of their nature, that God should cut the thread of their existence, and put an end to their beings, is to suppose him acting, as far as we can judge, quite contrary to the reasons of things, and the chief ends of the creation: for it seems very evident to our understandings, that much more happiness is producible by a grant of immortality, than by any succession of spirits temporary and mortal; forasmuch as the happiness of the blessed must naturally rise in a very high proportion to the length of their existence. Again: By parity of reason, it might as well be concluded, that God will some time or other annihilate the angels, and destroy the whole host of heaven, as that he should take away the existence of just men made perfect. There will be, both for men and angels, an employment adequate to the eternity we are speaking of. They may search for ever into the divine perfections, and divine workmanship, without being able to exhaust the subjects, or even comprehend them. They may copy after God's moral excellence, striving to approach it nearer and nearer through all ages; and yet ever remain at an infinite distance from it. In short, nothing less than immortality, nothing less than an endless duration, can suit that transcendent object, for the study, adoration, and en-

joyment, of which they were, both of them, originally created. These considerations, together with the arguments before produced from the frame and constitution of our minds, appear fully sufficient for the conviction of unprejudiced men. Yet, after all, though the doctrines of a future state, and the immortality of the soul, are supported by a great variety of clear and convincing proofs, arising from the mere light of natural reason; yet it is well and happy for us, that those proofs are enforced and confirmed by revelation; that we have assurances from Heaven of our perpetual existence, and that *life and immortality are fully brought to light in the gospel*. This gives a powerful sanction to the dictates of our consciences, and the decisions of our understandings. As the evidences of reason strengthen our faith, so the evidences of faith establish the doctrines of reason; thereby leaving us doubly without excuse, if we reject the truth, or suffer our minds to be drawn into a disbelief of this most important article.

The time will only permit me to point out very briefly what use we ought to make of the foregoing doctrine. Are we then designed for immortality, and fitted with suitable faculties for an endless duration? How grateful a sense ought we to have of the Creator's goodness and bounty! What tributes of praise and thanksgiving are due for such mighty blessings, such inestimable privileges! What returns of pious adoration, and religious reverence, in will, word, and deed! But more especially ought we to take care, as the best and most acceptable expression of our gratitude, that we make a wise and proper use of these blessings, that we walk worthy of the high expectations, and the glorious prospect which he has set before us; that we demean ourselves in such manner as becomes those who are made little lower than the angels, and alike destined for immortality; that, by a diligent application to wisdom and virtue, we improve our minds as much as possible, and prepare them for eternity to the utmost advantage. On our conduct here depends all our success hereafter. If, by evil practices, and vicious habits, we lay the foundations of a miserable futurity, our joy will be turned into grief and terror, and the greatest of all blessings into the deepest calamity, and the

the direſt curſe. In the next life, vice and virtue will each produce its own natural effects, however external cauſes may co-operate with them. Every vice, every evil habit, that we carry with us into another world, will, like an evil ſpirit, haunt us for ever, and perſecute us to all eternity. No fiends, no furies, will be able to torment men hereafter like ſin and guilt; the rage and remorse of which no words can repreſent, no thoughts conceive. On the other hand, every grace, every virtue, every good habit, will enlarge our capacities for happineſs, and be a further preparation for it. They will not only preſerve the ſoul in perpetual health and eaſe, but prove inexhaustible ſources of joy and gladneſs. They will likewiſe make it meet to partake of thoſe unſpeakable felicities which God has prepared for the righteous. And how bleſſed muſt that immortality be, where every thing within and every thing without, adminiſter delight, and conſpire to augment and eſtabliſh their happineſs. Laſtly: ſince there will be another life, and that an eternal one, it muſt be very abſurd to engage our affections deeply in this; or to be immoderately ſolicitous about any of its vain and tranſitory enjoyments. To ſet our hearts on the mean and perishing objects of this world, is, in effect, to forget the privileges of our nature, and the joys and glories of a bleſſed immortality. What are hours, or days, or years; nay, what is time itſelf, in compariſon of an eternal duration! This life can bear no proportion to the next; and yet we ſuffer it almoſt to engroſs our thoughts, and run away with our affections. We regard this very ſhort ſpan of time, as if it was eternity; and we regard eternity, as if it were nothing. Our reaſon plainly informs us, that, ſuppoſing a future ſtate dubious and uncertain, ſtill we ought to be provided for the important chance, and become adventurers for another world. But ſince we have all the evidence and aſſurance that can, in reaſon, be expected, or even deſired, what words are able to expreſs the folly, or rather frenzy, of thoſe, who ſlight ſuch a good, and neglect ſo great ſalvation! To conclude: if the greateſt and moſt durable happineſs that we are capable of wiſhing, be allowed to merit our attention and concern, then have we juſt cauſe to bend our

thoughts this way, and devote our beſt endeavours to the attainment of it. Our true intereſt prompts us to withdraw our affections from the fleeting ſhadows of this life; continually exhorting us to moderate our purſuit of *things temporal, that we finally loſe not the things which are eternal.*

S E R M O N IX.

By ARCHBISHOP TILLOTSON.

Of the great Duties of Natural Religion, with the ways and means of knowing them.

MICAH vi. 6, 7, 8.

Wherewith ſhall I come before the Lord, and bow myſelf before the high God? ſhall I come before him with burnt-offerings, with calves of a year old?

Will the Lord be pleaſed with thouſands of rams, or with ten thouſands of rivers of oil? ſhall I give my firſt-born for my tranſgreſſion, the fruit of my body for the ſin of my ſoul?

He hath ſhewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do juſtly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?

IN the beginning of this chapter, the Prophet tells the people of Iſrael, *that the Lord had a controversy with them;* and that he might direct them how to take up this quarrel, he brings in one making this inquiry in the name of the people; *Wherewith ſhall I come before the Lord, and bow myſelf before the high God?* that is, by what kind of worſhip or devotion may I addreſs myſelf to him in the moſt acceptable manner? by what means may I hope to appeaſe his diſpleaſure? To ſatisfy this enquiry, he firſt inſtanceth in the chief kinds of ſacrifices and expiations that were in uſe among the Jews and heathens; *ſhall I come before him with burnt-offerings?* the conſtant ſacrifice that was offered to God by way of acknowledgment of his dominion over the creatures; *with calves of a year old?* which was the ſin-offering which the high-prieſt offered for himſelf. Or will he rather accept of thoſe great and coſtly ſacrifices which were offered upon ſolemn and public occaſions, ſuch as that was which Solomon offered at the dedication of the temple? *will the Lord be pleaſed with*

with thousands of rams, or with ten thousands of rivers of oil? Or if none of these will do, shall I try to atone him after the manner of the heathen, by the dearest thing in the world, the first-born of my children? Shall I give my first-born for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? If God was to be appeased at all, surely they thought it must be by some of these ways, for beyond these they could imagine nothing of greater value and efficacy.

But the Prophet tells them that they were quite out of the way, in thinking to pacify God upon these terms, that there are other things which are much better and more pleasing to him than any of these sacrifices. For some of them were expressly forbidden by God, as the offering up of our children; and for the rest, they were not good in themselves, but merely by virtue of their institution, and because they were commanded. But the things which he would recommend to them, are such as are good in their own nature, and required of us by God upon that account. *He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?*

So that in these words you have,

First, an enquiry which is the best way to appease God when he is offended; *wherewith shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before the high God?*

Secondly, the way that men are apt to take in this case; and that is by some external piece of religion and devotion; such as sacrifice was both among Jews and Heathens. *Shall I come before him with burnt-offerings, &c.* By which questions the Prophet intimates that men are very apt to pitch upon this course.

Thirdly, the course which God himself directs to, and which will effectually pacify him. *He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord thy God require of thee, &c.*

The first being a mere question, there needs no more to be said of it; only that it is a question of great importance; what is the most effectual way to appease God when we have offended him? for who can bear his indignation, and who can stand before him, when once he is angry? Let us consider then, in the

Second place, the way that men are

apt to take to pacify God; and that is by some external piece of religion and devotion, such as were sacrifices among the Jews and Heathens, *shall I come before him with burnt-offerings?* This is the way which men are most apt to choose. The Jews, you see, pitched upon the external parts of their religion, those which were most pompous and solemn, the richest and most costly sacrifices; so they might but keep their sins, they were well enough content to offer up any thing else to God; they thought nothing too good for him, provided he would not oblige them to become better.

And thus it is among ourselves; when we apprehend God is displeased with us, and his judgments are abroad in the earth, we are content to do any thing, but *to learn righteousness*; we are willing to submit to any kind of external devotion and humiliation, to fast and pray, to afflict ourselves and to cry mightily unto God; things some of them good in themselves, but the least part of that which God requires of us.

And as for the church of Rome, in case of public judgments and calamities, they are the most inquisitive, and (as they pretend) the most skilful people in the world to pacify God: and they have a thousand solemn devices to this purpose. I do not wrong them by representing them enquiring after this manner. "Shall I go before a crucifix, and bow myself to it, as to the high God? And because the Lord is a great king, and it is perhaps too much boldness and arrogancy to make immediate addresses always to him; to which of the saints or angels shall I go to mediate for me, and intercede on my behalf? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of pater-nosters, or with ten thousands of ave-marys? Shall the host travel in procession, or myself undertake a tedious pilgrimage? Or shall I list myself a soldier for the holy war, or for the extirpation of heretics? Shall I give half my estate to a convent for my transgression, or chastise and punish my body for the sin of my soul?" Thus men deceive themselves, and will submit to all the extravagant severities, that the petulancy and folly of men can devise and impose upon them. And indeed it is not to be imagined, when men are once under the power of superstition, how ridiculous they

they may be, and yet think themselves religious; how prodigiously they may play the fool, and yet believe they please God; what cruel and barbarous things they may do to themselves and others, and yet be "verily persuaded they do God good service."

And what is the mystery of all this, but that men are loth to do that without which, nothing else that we do is acceptable to God? They hate to be reformed, and for this reason, they will be content to do any thing, rather than be put to the trouble of mending themselves; every thing is easy in comparison of this task, and God may have any terms of them, so he will let them be quiet in their sins, and excuse them from the real virtues of a good life. And this brings me to the

Third thing, which I principally intended to speak to. The course which God himself directs to, and which will effectually pacify him. *He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?* In handling of which I shall,

First, consider those several duties which God here requires of us, and upon the performance of which he will be pacified towards us.

Secondly, by what ways and means God hath discovered these duties to us, and the goodness of them; *he hath shewed thee, O man, what is good, &c.*

I. We will briefly consider the several duties which God here requires of us, and upon the performance of which he will be pacified towards us; *What doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?*

It was usual among the Jews to reduce all the duties of religion to these three heads, justice, mercy, and piety; under the first two, comprehending the duties which we owe to one another, and under the third, the duties which we owe to God.

1. Justice. And I was going to tell you what it is; but I considered that every man knows it, as well as any definition can explain it to him. I shall only put you in mind of some of the principal instances of it, and the several virtues comprehended under it. And,

First, justice is concerned in the making of laws; that they be such as are

equal and reasonable, useful and beneficial, for the honour of God and religion, and for the public good of human society; this is a great trust, in the discharge of which, if men be biassed by favour or interest, and drawn aside from the consideration and regard of the public good, it is a far greater crime and of worse consequence than any private act of injustice between man and man.

And then, justice is also concerned in the due execution of laws, which are the guard of private property, the security of public peace, and of religion and good manners. And,

Lastly, in the observance of laws and obedience to them; which is a debt that every man owes to human society.

But more especially justice is concerned in the observance of those laws, whether of God or man, which respect the rights of men, and their mutual commerce and intercourse with one another. That we use honesty and integrity in all our dealings, in opposition to fraud and deceit; truth and fidelity, in opposition to falsehood and breach of trust; equity and good conscience, in opposition to all kind of oppression and exaction. These are the principal branches, and instances of this great and comprehensive duty of justice; the violation whereof is so much the greater sin, because this virtue is the firmest bond of human society, upon the observation whereof, the peace and happiness of mankind does so much depend.

2. Mercy, which does not only signify the inward affection of pity and compassion towards those that are in misery and necessity, but the effects of it, in the actual relief of those whose condition calls for our charitable help and assistance; by feeding the hungry, and clothing the naked, and visiting the sick, and vindicating the oppressed, and comforting the afflicted, and ministering ease and relief to them if it be in our power. And this is a very lovely virtue, and argues more goodness in men than mere justice doth. For justice is a strict debt; but mercy is favour and kindness. And this perhaps may be the reason of the different expressions in the text, that when God barely commands us *to do justly*, he requires we should *love mercy*, that is, take a particular pleasure and delight in the exercise of this virtue, which is so proper and agreeable to mankind, that we commonly call it

it humanity, giving it its name from our very nature. In short, it is so excellent a virtue, that I should be very sorry that any religion should be able to pretend to the practice of it more than our own.

3. Piety; *to walk humbly with thy God.* *To walk humbly in the fear of the Lord;* so the Chaldee paraphrase renders these words. And this phrase may comprehend all those acts of religion which refer immediately to God; a firm belief of his being and perfections; an awful sense of him, as the dread sovereign and righteous judge of the world; a due regard to his service, and a reverent behaviour of ourselves towards him in all acts of worship and religion, in opposition to atheism and a prophane neglect and contempt of God and religion; a new and monstrous kind of impiety! which of late years hath broke in upon us, and got head among us, not only contrary to the example of former ages, but in despite of the very genius and temper of the nation, which is naturally devout and zealous in religion.

Or else this phrase of *walking humbly with God*, may refer more particularly to the posture and condition of the people of Israel at that time, who were fallen under the heavy displeasure of God for their sins. And then the duty required is, that being sensible how highly God hath been offended by us, by the general corruption and viciousness of the age, which like a leprosy hath spread itself almost over the whole body of the nation, and by that open lewdness and those insolent impieties which are daily committed amongst us; I say, that being deeply sensible of this, we do with all humility acknowledge our sins to God, and repent of them, and implore his mercy and forgiveness, and resolve by his grace *to turn every one from the evil of our ways, and from the wickedness that is in our hands*; which God grant we may every one do this day, according to the pious design and intention of it. And if we be sincere in this resolution, *who can tell but God will turn and repent, and turn away his anger from us, that we perish not.* Nay, we have great reason to believe, that he will be pacified towards us. So he hath declared, Isa. i. 16. *Wash ye, make you clean, put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes, cease to do evil, learn to do well, seek judgment, relieve*

the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow. Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord; though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool. But if we continue unreformed, God will say to us, as he does there to the people of Israel, *to what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me? your calling of assemblies I cannot away with, it is iniquity, even the solemn meeting. And when ye spread forth your hands, I will hide mine eyes from you; when ye make many prayers, I will not hear.* To which let me add that excellent saying of the son of Sirach to this purpose, (Ecclus. xxxiv. 25, 26.) *He that washeth himself after the touching of a dead body, if he touch it again, what availeth his washing? so is it with a man that fasteth for his sins, and goeth again and doth the same things. Who will hear his prayer, or what doth his humbling profit him?*

II. Let us consider by what ways and means God hath made known these duties to us, and the goodness and the obligation of them. *He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee?* I shall mention five ways whereby God hath discovered this to us.

1. By a kind of natural instinct.
2. By natural reason.
3. By the general vote and consent of mankind.
4. By external revelation.
5. By the inward dictates and motions of God's Spirit upon the minds of men.

First, by a kind of natural instinct; by which I mean a secret impression upon the minds of men, whereby they are naturally carried to approve some things as good and fit, and to dislike other things, as having a native evil and deformity in them. And this I call a natural instinct, because it does not seem to proceed so much from the exercise of our reason, as from a natural propension and inclination, like those instincts which are in brute creatures, of natural affection and care toward their young ones. And that these inclinations are precedent to all reason and discourse about them, evidently appears by this, that they do put forth themselves every whit as vigorously in young persons, as in those of riper reason; in the rude and ignorant sort of people,

people, as in those who are more polished and refined. For we see plainly that the young and ignorant have as strong impressions of piety and devotion, as true a sense of gratitude and justice and pity, as the wiser and more knowing part of mankind. A plain indication, that the reason of mankind is prevented by a kind of natural instinct and anticipation concerning the good or evil, the comeliness or deformity of these things. And though this do not equally extend to all the instances of our duty, yet as to the great lines and essential parts of it, mankind hardly need to consult any other oracle, than the mere propensions and inclinations of their nature; as, whether we ought to reverence the divine nature, to be grateful to those who have conferred benefits upon us, to speak the truth, to be faithful to our promise, to restore that which is committed to us in trust, to pity and relieve those that are in misery, and in all things to do to others as we would have them do to us. And this would further appear, if we consider these two things:

1. That men are naturally innocent or guilty to themselves, according to what they do in these things. So the apostle tells us (Rom. ii. 14, 15.): *When the gentiles which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these having not the law, are a law unto themselves, and do shew the effect of the law written in their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts by turns (that is according as they do well or ill) accusing or excusing them.* There is a secret comfort in innocence, and a strange pleasure and satisfaction in being acquitted by our own minds for what we do. But on the contrary, when we contradict these natural dictates, what uneasiness do we find in our own breasts? nay, even before the fact is committed, our conscience is strangely disquieted at the thoughts of it. When a man does but design to do a bad thing, he is as guilty to himself, as if he had committed it. Of this we have a considerable instance, in the first violence that was offered to nature, (Gen. iv. 6.) *The Lord said unto Cain, why art thou wroth, and why is thy countenance fallen?* the very thought of that wickedness which he did but then design, did disorder his mind, and make a change in his very countenance. Guilt is the natural

concomitant of heinous crimes, which so soon as ever a man commits, his spirit receives a secret wound, which causeth a great deal of smart and anguish. For guilt is restless, and puts the mind of man into an unnatural working and fermentation, never to be settled again but by repentance. *The wicked are like the troubled sea when it cannot rest;* which plainly shews that the mind of man hath a kind of natural sense of good and evil; because whenever we offend against nature, our consciences are touched to the quick, and we receive a sting into our soul, which shoots and pains us, whenever we reflect upon what we have done. I appeal to that witness which every man carries in his breast, whether this be not true.

2. Men are naturally full of hopes and fears, according as they follow or go against these natural dictates. A good conscience is apt to fill men with confidence and good hopes. It does not only give ease, but security to the mind of man, against the dread of invisible powers, and the fearful apprehensions of future judgment. Whereas guilt fills men with dismal apprehensions of danger, and continual misgivings concerning their own safety. Thus it was with Cain after he had slain his brother: *it shall come to pass, that every one that findeth me shall slay me.* Nay, when a man hath done a secret fault, which none can accuse him of, yet then is he haunted with the terrors of his own mind, and cannot be secure in his own apprehensions; which plainly shews that men are conscious to themselves, when they do well, and when they do amiss; and that the same natural instinct which prompts men to their duty, fills them with good hopes when they have done it, and with secret fears and apprehensions of danger when they have done contrary to it.

Secondly, God shews men what is good, by natural reason; and that two ways; by the convenience of things to our nature; and by their tendency to our happiness and interest.

First, Reason shews us the convenience of things to our nature; and whatever is agreeable to the primitive design and intention of nature, that we call good; whatever is contrary thereto, we call evil. For example—to honour and love God. It is natural to honour great power and

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perfection, and to love goodness wherever it is. So likewise, gratitude is natural, to acknowledge benefits received, and to be ready to requite them, and the contrary is monstrous, and universally abhorred; and there is no greater sign that any thing is contrary to nature, than if it be detested by the whole kind. It is agreeable also to nature to be just, and to do to others as we would have them do to us; for this is to make our own natural inclinations and desires, the rule of our dealing with others; and to be merciful; for no man that hath not divested himself of humanity, can be cruel and hard-hearted to others, without feeling a pain in himself.

Secondly, Reason shews us the tendency of these things to our happiness and interest. And indeed the notion of good and evil does commonly refer to the consequences of things, and we call that good, which will bring some benefit and advantage to us, and that evil, which is likely to produce some mischief and inconvenience; and by this rule reason discovers to us that these duties are good.

To begin with piety towards God. Nothing can more evidently tend to our interest, than to make him our friend, upon whose favour our happiness depends. So likewise for gratitude; it is a virtue, to which if nature did not prompt us, our interest would direct us; for every man is ready to place benefits there where he may hope for a thankful return. Temperance does apparently conduce to our health, which, next to a good conscience, is the most pleasant and valuable thing in the world; whereas the intemperate man is an open enemy to himself, and continually making assaults upon his own life. Mercy and pity are not more welcome to others, than they are delightful and beneficial to ourselves; for we do not only gratify our own nature and bowels, by relieving those who are in misery, but we provoke mankind by our example to the like tenderness, and do prudently bespeak the commiseration of others towards us, when it shall be our turn to stand in need of it. And if we be wise enough, our reason will likewise direct us to be just, as the surest art of thriving in this world; it gives a man a reputation, which is a powerful advantage in all the affairs of this world; it is the shortest and easiest way of dispatching

business, the plainest, and least entangled; and though it be not so sudden a way of growing rich, as fraud and oppression; yet it is much surer and more lasting, and not liable to those terrible back-blows and after-reckonings, to which estates got by injustice are.

And natural reason does not only shew us that these things are good, but that the Lord requires them of us, that is, that they have the force and obligation of laws. For there needs nothing more to make any thing a law, than a sufficient declaration, that it is the will of God; and this God hath sufficiently signified to mankind by the very frame of our natures, and of those principles and faculties which he hath endued us withal; so that whenever we act contrary to these, we plainly disobey the will of him that made us, and violate those laws which he hath enacted in our natures, and written upon our hearts.

And this is all the law that the greatest part of mankind were under, before the revelation of the gospel. From Adam to Moses, the world was almost solely governed by the natural law, which seems to be the meaning of that hard text (Rom. v. 13.) *For until the law sin was in the world*; that is, before the law of Moses was given, men were capable of offending against some other law, for otherwise sin could not have been imputed to them, for *sin is not imputed where there is no law*. And then it follows; *nevertheless death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over them that had not sinned after the similitude of Adam's transgression*; that is, during that space from Adam to Moses men sinned against the natural law, and were liable to death upon that account, though they had not offended against an express revelation from God, as Adam had done; for that the apostle seems to mean, by *sinning after the similitude of Adam's transgression*.

Thirdly, God hath shewn us what is good by the general vote and consent of mankind. Not that all mankind do agree concerning virtue and vice; but that as to the greater duties of piety, justice, mercy, and the like, the exceptions are but few in comparison, and not enough to infringe a general consent. And of this I shall offer to you this threefold evidence:

1. That

1. That these virtues are generally praised and held in esteem by mankind, and the contrary vices generally reprov'd and evil spoken of. Now to praise any thing, is to give testimony to the goodness of it; and to censure any thing, is to declare that we believe it to be evil. And if we consult the history of all ages, we shall find that the things which are generally praised in the lives of men, and recommended to the imitation of posterity, are piety and devotion, gratitude and justice, humanity and charity; and that the contrary to these are marked with ignominy and reproach: the former are commended even in enemies, and the latter are branded even by those who had a kindness for the persons that were guilty of them. So constant hath mankind always been in the commendation of virtue, and in the censure of vice. Nay, we find not only those who are virtuous themselves, giving their testimony and applause to virtue, but even those who are vicious; not out of love to goodness, but from the conviction of their own minds, and from a secret reverence they bear to the common consent and opinion of mankind. And this is a great testimony, because it is the testimony of an enemy extorted by the meer light and force of truth.

And on the contrary; nothing is more ordinary than for "vice to reprove sin," and to hear men condemn the like, or the same things in others, which they allow in themselves. And this is a clear evidence, that vice is generally condemned by mankind, that many men condemn it in themselves; and those who are so kind as to spare themselves, are very quick-sighted to spy a fault in any body else, and will censure a bad action done by another, with as much freedom and impartiality, as the most virtuous man in the world.

And to this consent of mankind about virtue and vice, the scripture frequently appeals. As when it commands us to *provide things honest in the sight of all men; and by well-doing to put to silence the ignorance of foolish men*; intimating that there are some things so confessedly good, and owned to be such by so general a vote of mankind, that the worst of men have not the face to open their mouths against them. And it is made the character of a virtuous action, if it

be lovely, and commendable, and of good report. (Philip. iv. 8.) *Whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report, if there be any virtue, if there be any praise, make account of these things*; intimating to us, that mankind do generally concur in the praise and commendation of what is virtuous.

2. Men do generally glory and stand upon their innocency, when they do virtuously; but are ashamed, and out of countenance, when they do the contrary. Now glory and shame are nothing else but an appeal to the judgment of others concerning the good or evil of our actions. There are indeed some such monsters as are impudent in their impieties, but these are but few in comparison. Generally mankind is modest; the greatest part of those who do evil are apt to blush at their own faults, and to confess them in their countenance, which is an acknowledgment that they are not only guilty to themselves that they have done amiss, but that they are apprehensive that others think so. For guilt is a passion respecting ourselves, but shame regards others. Now it is a sign of shame, that men love to conceal their faults from others, and commit them secretly, in the dark and without witnesses, and are afraid even of a child or a fool: or if they be discovered in them, they are solicitous to excuse and extenuate them, and ready to lay the fault upon any body else, or to transfer their guilt, or as much of it as they can, upon others. All which are certain tokens, that men are not only naturally guilty to themselves, when they commit a fault; but that they are sensible also what opinions others have of these things.

And on the contrary, men are apt to stand upon their justification, and to glory when they have done well. The conscience of a man's own virtue and integrity, lifts up his head and gives him confidence before others, because he is satisfied they have a good opinion of his actions. What a good face does a man naturally set upon a good deed? and how does he sneak, when he hath done wickedly, being sensible that he is condemned by others, as well as by himself? No man is afraid of being upbraided for having dealt honestly or kindly with others, nor does he account

it any calumny or reproach, to have it reported of him, that he is a sober and chaste man. No man blusheth, when he meets a man with whom he hath kept his word, and discharged his trust: but every man is apt to do so, when he meets one with whom he has dealt dishonestly, or who knows some notorious crime by him.

3. Vice is generally forbidden and punished by human laws: but against the contrary virtues there never was any law. Some vices are so manifestly evil in themselves, or so mischievous to human society, that the laws of most nations have taken care to discountenance them by severe penalties. Scarce any nation was ever so barbarous, as not to maintain and vindicate the honour of their gods and religion by public laws. Murder and adultery, rebellion and sedition, perjury and breach of trust, fraud and oppression, are vices severely prohibited by the laws of most nations. A clear indication, what opinion the generality of mankind, and the wisdom of nations, have always had of these things.

But now against the contrary virtues there never was any law. No man was ever impeached for *living soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world*. A plain acknowledgment, that mankind always thought them good, and never were sensible of the inconvenience of them; for had they been so, they would have provided against them by laws. This St. Paul takes notice of as a great commendation of the christian virtues; *the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, kindness, fidelity, meekness, temperance; against such there is no law*: the greatest evidence that could be given, that these things are unquestionably good in the esteem of mankind, *against such there is no law*. And if he had said, turn over the law of Moses, search those of Athens, and Sparta, and the twelve tables of the Romans, and those innumerable laws that have been added since; and you shall not in any of them find any of those virtues that I have mentioned, condemned and forbidden. A clear evidence that mankind never took any exception against them, but are generally agreed about the goodness of them.

Fourthly, God hath shewn us what is

good by external revelation. In former ages of the world, God revealed his will to particular persons in an extraordinary manner, and more especially to the nation of the Jews, the rest of the world being in a great measure left to the conduct of natural light. But in these latter ages he hath made public revelation of his will by his Son. And this as to the matter of our duty, is the same in substance with the law of nature; for our Saviour comprehends all under these two general heads, *the love of God, and of our neighbour*. The apostle reduceth all to three, sobriety, justice, and piety; *the grace of God that brings salvation hath appeared to all men, teaching us that denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world*, so that if we believe the apostle, the gospel teacheth us the very same things which nature dictated to men before; only it hath made a more perfect discovery of them. So that whatever was doubtful and obscure before, is now certain and plain; the duties are still the same, only it offers us more powerful arguments, and a greater assistance to the performance of those duties; so that we may now much better say, than the prophet could in his days, *he hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what it is that the Lord requires of thee*.

Fifthly, and lastly, God shews us what is good by the motions of his Spirit upon the minds of men. This the Scripture assures us of, and good men have experience more especially of it; though it be hard to give an account of it, and to say what motions are from the Spirit of God, and what from our own minds; for, *as the wind blows where it listeth, and we hear the sound of it, but know not whence it comes, nor whither it goes*; so are the operations of the Spirit of God upon the minds of men, secret and imperceptible.

And thus I have done with the three things I propounded to speak to. All that now remains, is to make some inferences from what hath been said, by way of application.

First, Seeing God hath so abundantly provided that we should know our duty, we are altogether inexcusable, if we do not do it. Because *he hath shewed thee, O man, what is good, and what the Lord requires*

*requires of thee; therefore thou art inexcusable, O man, whosoever thou art, who livest in a contradiction to this light. God hath acquainted us with our duty, by such ways as may most effectually both direct and engage us to the practice of it; we are prompted to it by a kind of natural instinct, and strong impressions upon our minds of the difference of good and evil; we are led to the knowledge, and urged to the practice of it, by our nature, and by our reason, and by our interest, and by that which is commonly very prevalent among men, the general voice and consent of mankind; and by the most powerful and governing passions in human nature, by hope, and by fear, and by shame; by the prospect of advantage, by the apprehension of danger, and by the sense of honour; and to take away all possible excuse of ignorance from us, by an express revelation from God, the clearest and most perfect that ever was made to the world. So that whenever we do contrary to our duty, in any of these great instances, we offend against all these, and do in the highest degree fall under the heavy sentence of our Saviour, *this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light.**

Secondly, You see hence what are the great duties of religion, which God mainly requires of us, and how reasonable they are; piety towards God, and justice and charity towards men; the knowledge whereof is planted in our nature, and grows up with our reason. And these are things which are unquestionably good, and against which we can have no exception; things that were never reprov'd, nor found fault with by mankind, neither our nature nor our reason riseth up against them, or dictates any thing to the contrary. We have all the obligation, and we have all the encouragement to them, and are secure on all hands in the practice of them. In the doing of these things, there is no danger to us from the laws of men, no fear of displeasure from God, no offence or sting from our own minds.

And these things, which are so agreeable to our nature, and our reason, and our interest, are the great things which our religion requires of us, more valuable in themselves, and more acceptable to

God, than *whole burnt-offerings and sacrifices, more than thousands of rams, and ten thousands of rivers of oil; more than if we offered to him all the beasts of the forest, and the cattle upon a thousand hills.* We are not to neglect any institution of God; but above all, we are to secure the observance of those great duties to which we are directed by our very nature, and tied by the surest and most sacred of all other laws, those which God hath riveted in our souls, and written upon our hearts: and that mankind might have no pretence left to excuse them from these, the christian religion hath set us free from those many positive and outward observances, that the Jewish religion was incumbred withal; that we might be wholly intent upon these great duties, and mind nothing in comparison of the real and substantial virtues of a good life.

Thirdly, You see, in the last place, what is the best way to appease the displeasure of God towards a sinful nation. God seems to have as great a controversy with us, as he had with the people of Israel, and his wrath is of late years most visibly gone out against us; and proportionably to the full measure of our sins, it hath been poured out upon us in full phials. How have the judgments of God followed us? and how close have they followed one another? what fearful calamities have our eyes seen? enough to make the ears of every one that hears them to tingle. What terrible and hazardous wars have we been engaged in? what a raging pestilence did God send among us, that swept away thousands, and ten thousands in our streets? what a dreadful and fatal fire, that was not to be checked and resisted in its course, till it had laid in ashes one of the greatest and richest cities in the world? what unseasonable weather have we had of late? as if for the wickedness of men upon the earth, the very ordinances of heaven were *changed, and summer, and winter, seed-time, and harvest, had forgotten their appointed seasons.* And which is more and sadder than all this, what dangerous attempts have been made upon our religion, by the restless adversaries of it?

And now surely, *after all this is come upon us for our sins,* it is time for us to look up to him that smites us, and to

think of taking up this quarrel. 'Tis time to inquire as they do in the text, *wherewithal shall we come before the Lord, and bow ourselves before the high God?* and we are apt to take the same course they did, to endeavour to appease God by some external devotion. We have now betaken ourselves to prayer and fasting, and it was very fit, nay necessary we should do so; but let us not think this is all God expects from us. These are but the means to a further end, to oblige us for the future to the practice of a good life. The outward profession of religion is not lost amongst us, there appears still in men a great and commendable zeal for the reformed religion, and there hath been too much occasion for it; but that which God chiefly expects from us, is reformed lives. Piety and virtue are in a great measure gone from among us, the manners of men are strangely corrupted, *the great and weighty things of the law* are neglected, *justice and mercy, temperance and chastity, truth and fidelity*; so that we may take up David's complaint, *help Lord! for the righteous man ceaseth, for the faithful fail from among the children of men.*

And till the nation be brought back to a sober sense of religion, from an airy and phantastical piety, to real and unaffected devotion, and from a factious contention about things indifferent, to the serious practice of what is necessary; from our violent heats and animosities, to a more peaceable temper, and by a mutual condescension on all sides, to a nearer and stronger union among ourselves, till we recover in some measure our ancient virtue and integrity of manners, we have reason to fear, that God will still have a controversy with us, notwithstanding all our noise and zeal about religion.

This is the true, this is the only course to appease the indignation of God, and to draw down his favour and blessing upon a poor distracted and gasping nation. *He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God.*

I have but one word more, and that is to put you presently upon the practice of one of these duties that I have been persuading you to, and that is

mercy, and alms to the poor. If what I have already said, have had its effect upon you, I need not use any other arguments; if it have not, I have hardly the heart to use any. I shall only put you in mind again, that God values this above all our external devotion, *he will have mercy rather than sacrifice*; that this is the way to find mercy with God, and to have our prayers speed in heaven; and without this, all our fasting and humiliation signifies nothing. And to this purpose I will only read to you those plain and persuasive words of the prophet, which do so fully declare unto us the whole duty of this day, and particularly urge us to this of charity, (Isa. lviii. 5, 6, 7, 8, 9.) *Is it such a fast that I have chosen? a day for a man to afflict his soul? is it to bow down his head as a bulrush, and to spread sackcloth and ashes under him? wilt thou call this a fast, and an acceptable day unto the Lord? is not this the fast that I have chosen? to loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, and to let the oppressed go free, and that ye break every yoke? is it not to deal thy bread to the hungry, and that thou bring the poor that are cast out to thy house? when thou seest the naked, that thou cover him, and that thou hide not thyself from thine own flesh? then shall thy light break forth as the morning, and thy salvation shall spring forth speedily, and thy righteousness shall go before thee, and the glory of the Lord shall be thy reward. Then thou shalt call, and the Lord shall answer; thou shalt cry, and he shall say, here I am.*

SERMON X.

By BISHOP SHERLOCK.

On the Prejudices formed, or Offences taken, against the Gospel of JESUS CHRIST.

MATTHEW, xi. 6.

Blessed is he whosoever shall not be offended in me.

IN the beginning of this chapter we read, that the Baptist sent two of his disciples to Christ, to inquire of him whether he was indeed the great Prophet so long expected by the people, and foretold

foretold by the Prophets, or whether they were still to expect and wait the coming of another. Our Saviour detained the disciples of John, till he had made them eye-witnesses of the mighty power that was in him. They saw, at the command of his word, the blind receive sight, the lame walk, the lepers cleansed, the deaf restored to hearing, and the dead raised up to life again: they saw likewise that these mighty powers were exercised without giving the least suspicion of any worldly design; that no court was made to the great or wealthy, by singling them out either for patients or for disciples. The benefit of the miracles was chiefly the lot of the poor; and as they were better disposed to receive the gospel, so were they preferred before the rich and mighty to be the disciples of Christ. When the Baptist's disciples had seen and heard these things, our Saviour thought them sufficiently enabled to satisfy John in the inquiry upon which he had sent them: *Go, says he, and shew John those things which ye do hear and see: the blind receive their sight, and the lame walk; the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear; the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached to them.* Then follow immediately the words of the text: *and blessed is he whosoever shall not be offended in me.*

The close connection of the text with the last words of the fifth verse, shews us what sort of persons our Saviour had in his eye, when he spoke of the offence taken at him in the world: *the poor*, says he, *have the gospel preached to them: and blessed is he whosoever shall not be offended in me.* As if he had said, the poor are ready to embrace the gospel, and happy are in this, yea happier far, notwithstanding their present uncomfortable condition, than the honourable and the learned, who are too great, and in their own opinion too wise, to hearken to the instructions of the gospel.

The words thus explained lead us to inquire,

First, What are the offences which are generally taken at the gospel of Christ:

Secondly, From what source these offences come.

The poverty and meanness in which our Saviour appeared, was the earliest, and may probably be the latest, objection to the gospel. He came from God to

convert and to save the world, to declare the purposes and the commands of the Almighty, and to exact obedience from every creature; but he came with less attendance and shew than if he had been an ordinary messenger from the governor of a province. Hence it is, that we so often find him upbraided either with the meanness of his parentage, the obscurity of his country, or the present necessity of his circumstances: *Is not this the Carpenter's son?* says one; *Can any good come out of Nazareth?* says another; *or any prophet out of Galilee?* says a third. And when they saw him oppressed with sufferings, and weighed down with afflictions, they openly insulted his sorrow, and triumphed over his fond pretences to save the world: *Thou, say they, that destroyest the temple, and buildest it in three days, save thyself: if thou be the Son of God, come down from the cross.* And so blinded are men with the notions of worldly greatness, and so apt to conceive of the majesty of God according to their own ideas of power and dignity, that this prejudice has prevailed in every age. The Apostle to the Corinthians preached Christ crucified; but he was to the Jews a stumbling block, and to the Greeks foolishness: for the Jews required a sign, a visible temporal deliverance, and had no notion, much less any want, as they could apprehend, of such a Saviour as Jesus. The Greeks sought after wisdom, and thought that, if God were indeed to redeem the world, he would act more suitably to his power and wisdom: whenever they made their Jupiter speak, his voice was thunder, and lightning was his appearance, and he delivered oracles not to be communicated to vulgar ears. So in the Old Testament, when God speaks, clouds and darkness are round about him, and his presence and his voice are terrible. But here every thing had a different turn: the appearance was in the likeness of a man, and in the form of a servant; and, as he came in like a servant, he went out like a slave, *he was esteemed stricken, and his departure was taken for misery.* His doctrine was framed rather to purify the heart, and to give wisdom to the simple, than to exercise the head, and furnish matter for the curious and learned; to be a general instruction and a common rule of life to all men, and not to satisfy the vanity of worldly wisdom in inquiries

above its reach. With Him the precepts of virtue are the principles of wisdom and holiness, the greatest ornament of the mind of man.

But these things the wise and the great men of the world find hard to reconcile with the wisdom and majesty of God, according to their notions of wisdom and power. Why did not Christ, say they, appear in the power and majesty of his father? Would not the embassy have been more worthy both of God and of Him? Would any prince, who had a mind to reclaim his rebellious subjects to obedience, not rather chuse to send a person of honour with a suitable retinue, whose appearance might command respect and credit, than an ambassador clothed in rags and poverty, fit only to create in the rebels a greater contempt both of himself and his prince? If it was the purpose of God, that the world through faith should be saved, would not the world more securely and readily have confided in one whose very appearance would have spoke his dignity, than in one who seemed to be even more miserable than themselves, and not able to rescue himself from the vilest and most contemptible death?

But let us now, in the second place, consider what foundation there is in reason for this great prejudice.

It is no wonder to hear men reason upon the notions and ideas which are familiar to them. Great power and great authority are connected with the ideas of great pomp and splendor; and, when we talk of the works of God, our minds naturally turn themselves to view the great and miraculous works of Providence: and this is the reason why men are slow to discern the hand of God in the ordinary course of nature, where things, being familiar to us, do not strike with wonder and admiration.

When Naaman the Syrian came to the prophet of Israel to be cured of his leprosy, Elisha sent a messenger unto him, saying, *Go and wash in Jordan seven times, and thy flesh shall come again unto thee, and thou shalt be clean.* The haughty Syrian disdained the easy cure, and scorned the prophet: Is this your man of God, and this his mighty power to send me to a pitiful river of Israel? *Behold,* says he, *I thought he will surely come out to me, and stand and call on the name of the Lord his God, and strike his hand over the place, and*

recover the leper. Are not Abana and Pharpar, rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? may I not wash in them, and be clean? So he turned, and went away in a rage. But his servants, not a little wiser than their master, thus reason the case with him: *My father, if the prophet had bid thee do some great thing, wouldst thou not have done it? how much rather then, when he saith unto thee, Wash and be clean? Upon this gentle rebuke his stomach came down, and he condescended to follow the prophet's direction; and his flesh came again, like the flesh of a young child, and he was clean.* Not unlike to Naaman's folly is theirs, who take offence at the poverty and meanness of the Author of our redemption. His sentiments and theirs agree: he expected to have seen some surprising wonder wrought for his cure; and, when he was bid only to wash, he thought there could be nothing of God in so trifling a remedy. And is not this their sense, who think that so obscure, so mean a person as Jesus, could never be the messenger of God upon so great an errand as the salvation of the world? who thus expostulate, Why came he not in a majesty suitable to his employment, and then we would have believed him; but how can we expect to be raised to the glory of God by him who was himself the scorn and contempt of men?

If we search this prejudice to the bottom, we shall find that it arises from a false conception of the power and majesty of God, as if the success of his purposes depended upon the visible fitness of the instruments he made choice of. With men we know the case is so; they must use means which they can judge to be adapted to the end they aim at, if they intend to prosper in what they undertake: but with God, it is otherwise. To stop the current even of the smallest river, banks must be raised, and sluices cut, when the work is done by man: but in the hand of God the rod of Moses was more than sufficient to curb the rage of the sea, and force it to yield a passage to his people. *The foolishness of God,* says the Apostle, *is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men:* teaching us that we should not presume to sit in judgment upon the methods of providence; since, how foolish or how weak soever they may seem to us, they will

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will be found in his hand to be the wisest and the strongest. And this reasoning the Apostle applies to the case now before us: *The cross of Christ was a stumbling-block to the Jews, and to the Greeks foolishness; but unto all them that are called, the power of God, and the wisdom of God; because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God stronger than men.* However the Jews, or however the Greeks conceived of the crucified Jesus, yet to every believer he is the mighty power of God to salvation, because God ordained him so to be; and this ordination gives full efficacy to the cross of Christ, however in itself contemptible, and to all human appearance unfit for the purpose. The waters of Jordan had no natural efficacy to cleanse a leper; in the rod of Moses there was no power to divide the sea: but, when ordained by God to these purposes, the sea fled back at the touch of Moses's rod, and the leprosy of Naaman was purged by the so much despised waters of Israel. If we would judge truly, the more simple and plain the methods of providence are, the more do they speak the power of the Almighty. When God said, *Let there be light, and there was light*, his uncontrollable power more evidently appeared, than if all the angels of heaven had been employed to produce it. When our Lord said, *I will, be thou clean*, and the person was cleansed, his divinity shone forth more brightly, than if he had commanded all the powers above visibly to assist him. So likewise, when God committed the redemption of the world to Jesus, a man of sorrow and affliction, and of no form or comeliness, and gave him the power of doing such works as never man did, in confirmation of his commission, he appeared as plainly in him, as if he had clothed him with visible majesty and power. If we consider him afflicted and tormented, and given up to a cruel death, it proves indeed that he was weak and mortal; but still God is strong, and not the less able to establish the word which he spoke by this weak, this mortal man.

As to this part of the offence then, so far as the majesty and power of God are concerned, it proceeds from very wrong notions in both cases, and supposes that the majesty of God wants the same little supports of outward pomp and grandeur

as that of men does, and that his power depends upon the fitness of instrumental or material causes, as human power plainly does; whereas the majesty and power of God are never more clearly seen, than when he makes choice of the *weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty.*

Let us then in the next place consider, with respect to men, whether the advantages on their side would have been greater, had Christ appeared in greater splendor and with more visible power and authority.

How far the imaginations of some men may rove upon such inquiries as these, or what degrees of splendor and glory they would judge sufficient for their purpose, I cannot tell. This we are sure of, that the majesty of the Almighty is not to be approached by human eyes; that therefore, whenever it descends to treat with men, it must be veiled and obscured under such representations as men can bear. This is true, you'll say; but is there no medium between the immediate presence of God, and his appearing in the form of a servant, and dying, not as the children of men commonly die, but as the vilest and most profligate criminal? Many degrees there are, no doubt, of visible glory, in any of which Christ might have appeared, but in none with greater advantage to religion than that in which he came. Suppose he had come, as the Jews expected, in the form of a mighty prince, and in that situation had propagated his faith and doctrine; what would the unbelievers then have said? How often should we have been told before now, that our religion was the work of human policy, and that our Prince's doctrine and dominions were extended by the same sword? Was ever any religion the better thought of for having been preached at the head of an army? This is certain, that, to make religion a rational act of the mind, it cannot be conveyed to us in too easy and familiar a manner: the less awe we have of our teacher, the more freedom we shall exercise in weighing and examining his doctrines. And upon this account our Saviour's appearance was in the most proper form, as it gave to men the greatest scope and liberty of trying and searching into his doctrines and pretences: and therefore his meanness and poverty

poverty should least of all be objected by those who seem to contend for nothing more than to clear religion from fears and prejudices.

But perhaps they will say, we wanted him not to appear in worldly state and glory, or to exercise temporal dominion on earth; we would have been contented with a visible, though an inferior kind of manifestation of his divine authority. *O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have written!* What think ye of giving sight to the blind; of opening the ears of the deaf; of loosening the tongue that was dumb; of restoring health to the sick; of raising the dead to life again; of raising even himself from the grave, and abolishing the scandal of the cross by a visible victory and triumph over death? What do ye call these things? What do they manifest to you? Are these the works of that mean man, that wretched, that crucified mortal, of whom we have been speaking? Do slaves and servants, nay, do princes and the greatest of the children of men, use to perform such works? If not, these are the very manifestations of divine power and authority which you require. Nor can it, I believe, enter into the heart of man to contrive any greater signs to ask of any person pretending to a divine commission, than these which our Saviour daily and publicly gave the world of his authority. Had he appeared with all the visible power and glory which you can conceive, yet still you cannot imagine what greater works than these he could possibly perform: and therefore the evidence now, under all the meanness of his appearance, is the same for his divine authority and commission, as it would have been, had he come in the greatest pomp of glory and power.

As to us, I think, who are removed at a distance from the scene of this action, the evidence is much greater. Had he come in surprising glory, we might have suspected the relations of men, who, we might well think, saw and heard every thing under the greatest astonishment, and, like St. Paul when he was caught up to the third heaven, could hardly tell whether they were in the body, or out of the body. But now we have the evidence of men who lived and conversed with him familiarly, who saw all his

mighty works, and saw them without surprise or astonishment, being reconciled to them by daily use, and the long-experienced gentleness and love of their Master; and therefore they very justly introduce their accounts with this assurance, *That they relate that only which they had heard, which they had seen with their eyes, which they had looked upon, and which their hands had handled, of the word of life.* So far are we then from having any just cause of offence in the poverty and meanness of our blessed Lord, that from those circumstances arises the great stability of our faith, and this comfortable assurance, that our faith standeth not in the words or in the works of man's wisdom and power, but in the power and in the wisdom of the Almighty, who knows how to produce strength out of weakness.

S E R M O N XI.

The same Subject continued.

MATTHEW, xi. 6.

Blessed is he whosoever shall not be offended in me.

I HAVE already examined the first and great prejudice against the gospel, arising from the poverty and meanness of our blessed Lord, and the low condition of life in which he appeared in the world, and the wretched circumstances which put an end to it; and shewed it to be so far from being a just offence against the gospel, that, when fairly considered, it serves to recommend religion to us with all possible advantage, and the more eminently to set forth the love of Christ, and the wisdom and goodness of God, in the gospel.

It was from the offence taken at the mean condition of our Lord, that the cross became a *stumbling-block to the Jews*. It became also, as the Apostle says, *foolishness to the Greeks*: for they sought after wisdom; and, not finding the wisdom they sought after in the gospel, it was esteemed by them as foolishness.

The great articles upon which all religion depends, are the nature of God, the immortality of the soul, and the certainty of future rewards and punishments in another life after this. These things have

have ever exercised the wit and learning of the considering part of mankind, and philosophy has furnished difficulties on every side; and, were they well cleared up, it is thought religion would want no other support. But in vain do you search the gospel of Christ for a solution of these difficulties: he has not so much as entered into them, or once attempted to give an account of the nature or essence of God, or of an human soul, or to consider the difficulties that are urged by the schools against its separate existence from the body. Future rewards and punishments he has indeed fully asserted; but, as to the nature and manner of them, and the soul's existence in each state, he has left them involved in the same intricacies in which he found them. And yet, say the disputers of this world, who would not expect from a person sent from God to have all his difficulties solved which affect the belief and practice of religion? We are bid to be good and holy, and are promised immortality: so far 'tis well. But did he not know what doubts exercise the most learned men concerning the nature of God, and of the soul, and its passage to another world, and concerning the place and condition of that other world? Why were not these doubts cleared? Had he opened to us this dark scene of nature, and made us to understand the contexture of the soul, and its manner of subsisting out of the body; had he taught us to comprehend the state and nature of the other world, such doctrines, such discoveries would have been sufficient evidence of the divine wisdom: but now we are only taught the plain doctrines of morality, and are bid to take his word for our immortality.

To clear up this great and unreasonable offence against the gospel, I desire you would consider with me the following particulars:

First, That the objection does not lie properly against the gospel of Christ; but, if there be any sense in it, it must rise higher, and strike at the wisdom and goodness of God in the creation: for, if any fault is to be found in this matter, it is not with Christ for not teaching us more wisdom than we are capable of, but with God for not making us wiser than we are. And hence it will appear, that the objection is both impious and senseless.

Secondly, That this objection, allowing it its full force, does no way affect the belief or practice of religion; because religion depends entirely upon the certainty of the soul's immortality, and of a future state of rewards and punishments; which certainly no way depends upon the knowledge of the nature of the things themselves, since we are and may be certain of many things, the nature of which we neither do nor can know. And hence it will appear, that the difficulties arising from the consideration of the nature of these things cannot affect our belief of the certainty of them, if it be supported by proper evidence; and, consequently, that religion is no way concerned to remove these difficulties. And,

Thirdly, That the gospel has given us the greatest evidence for the certainty and reality of these things, that can be thought on or desired. And hence it will appear, that the doctrines of the gospel are such as are adapted to the service of religion, and as might be expected from a teacher divinely inspired.

And first, Let it be considered, that this objection does not lie against the gospel of Christ; but, if there be any force in it, it strikes immediately at the wisdom and goodness of God in the creation.

As long as men keep to the plain simple points in which religion is concerned, there is no danger of their splitting upon these insuperable difficulties. If they seek after God, the whole creation will lead them to him; *for the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things which are made, even his eternal power and godhead.* If they search after the immortality of the soul, and the certainty of a future state of rewards and punishments, these truths will be suggested to them from their own natural sense of good and evil, and the notions of God's wisdom, and justice, and goodness, compared with the present unequal distributions of rewards and punishments; which can be accounted for upon no other foot, nor reconciled to the natural sense God has implanted in us of the difference of good and evil, and the notions we have of his excellency and perfection. But, if they launch out into philosophical inquiries, and, not content to know that God is, without knowing what he is, endeavour to pry into the nature and manner

ner of the existence of the Almighty; or if, not satisfied with the moral certainty of a future state, they want to look into the contexture of the soul, and to see there the natural seeds of immortality; 'tis no wonder if they make shipwreck both of their reason and their faith at once: for this knowledge is too high for men. God has not given us faculties to enable us to comprehend these mysteries of nature; and therefore we must always of necessity wander out of the way, and be bewildered, when we search after them. For let any man consider whence it is that the difficulty of these inquiries ariseth: 'tis not for want of teaching, for all the teaching in the world will not enable men to comprehend the things of which they can form no notions or ideas. And this is the case: the seeds of this knowledge are not implanted in our nature, and therefore no cultivation can ever produce it. There is nothing which ever fell under the notice of our senses, to which the existence and being of God can be likened, nothing that bears any proportion of similitude to the natural frame and make of our souls: and therefore 'tis impossible to represent these things to the mind of man; for 'tis not in the power of any sound of words to create new notions or ideas in our mind, or to convey new knowledge without them. God has set bounds to our knowledge by limiting our faculties, beyond which our utmost care and diligence, however assisted, cannot advance. Whatever wisdom or excellency of knowledge may be in our teacher, 'tis impossible he should infuse more into us than we are capable of receiving; as a vessel can never receive more than its measure, though it be filled out of the sea.

This being the state and condition of men, it had been to little purpose, if our blessed Lord had attempted to let them into the knowledge of those great secrets of nature, which the curious and learned are so desirous of prying into. His business was to instruct them in the ways of virtue and holiness, to awaken their sleepy souls and rouse their stupid consciences to a sense of goodness, to shew them the way to peace and happiness, by setting before them the precepts of God and nature in their true uncorrupted purity: and this he has done, even by the confession of his greatest enemies, who in

this part have nothing to object, but that his laws are too good and too holy for their observance. 'Tis the great excellency of a teacher to speak to the sense and understanding of the people; and, whenever he rises above them, he is lost in the clouds, and his words are mere air and sound: and therefore, whatever wisdom and knowledge were in our blessed Saviour, 'tis folly to expect from him any greater degrees of either, than we are capable of comprehending. As he was our prophet and teacher, it was his business to be understood; and he forbore teaching us the deep mysteries of nature, for the same reason that we do not teach children Algebra, not that we envy them the knowledge, but that we know they are incapable of it. Instead of improving the nature of man, he must have destroyed it, and new-created him, to have made him capable of a clear insight into all the mysteries which the curious seem desirous of knowing. And, could he have given us all the knowledge we thirst after, yet still the way to happiness would be the same, and we could do nothing to set forward our salvation, which he has not already both instructed and enabled us to do: and therefore, as the case stands, he has fully performed the office of a divine teacher, having fully instructed us *in the things which make for our peace*.

If you will press this argument any farther, you must plead the cause with God, and not with Christ: he has taught you all that you were capable of knowing; and you must inquire of God, why he made you no better and no wiser. And had it not, you'll say, been better, if God had given us such enlarged faculties, as might have enabled us to surmount all difficulties of this kind? If you ask me, I can readily answer, that I had rather I were an angel than a man; but I know of no right I had to be either; and that I am either, is owing purely to the goodness and beneficence of my Creator. Had he left me still in the lump of clay out of which I was formed, he had done me no injury, nor could any complaint have been formed against him on my behalf. For what I have, I have reason to be thankful; for what I have not, I have no reason to complain.

Had God indeed given us only the faculties of men, and required of us the service

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service of angels, we might then with some justice have lamented the unequal weight: but now that he requires nothing of us but what we are able to perform, and what, according to our present degree of understanding, it is highly reasonable we should perform, it is great perverseness to hang back for want of more light, and a greater capacity to understand what it is no way necessary for us to understand. Our present faculties, if rightly applied, will lead us to a certainty of the being of a God, to the knowledge of his excellency and perfection, and will instruct us wherein our reasonable service to him does consist: and shall we, when we know there is an all-sufficient being, and that it is our duty to serve him, shall we, I say, suspend our duty, because we meet with great difficulties in trying to comprehend his nature and manner of existence? As weak as we are, we may assuredly know, *that God will one day judge the world in righteousness, and reward every man according to his doings*: and shall we not listen to this great motive to obedience, because we are not able to know how the soul can act distinctly from the body, or how it can be united to it again? It would be altogether as reasonable for a merchant not to trade to the Indies, though he is sure there is great wealth and riches there, 'till he can account to himself for the nature of all the surprising objects in that other world; or for a man not to eat, though he is sure it would nourish and support his life, till he can see the reason of nutrition, and give an account of all the secret ways by which nature performs the work.

God has given us knowledge sufficient to be the foundation of our duty; and, if we will use the light we have, we shall be happy. The great mistake which men commit in reflecting upon these matters, is, That they suppose they should have better evidence for the things of another world, could they overcome these difficulties, which cross them perpetually in the search after nature: And this would indeed be a real advantage to religion, if it were so; but that it is not, will appear in the following considerations: For,

Secondly, The difficulties which arise in considering the natural properties of things, do no way affect the certainty

and reality of their existence: If they did, we could be certain of the real existence of no one thing; since there is nothing but what affords us very great difficulties, when we come to account for the nature and properties of it. Let what will be the subject, I think, there cannot be two more different inquiries, than when we examine whether the thing really is, and when we examine what it is: They are inquiries which do not at all depend one upon the other. We can examine the properties of some things, without so much as reflecting whether there ever were such things, or no. When the mathematician considers the properties of an exact circle or square, it matters him not whether there be such perfect figures in the world, or no; nor does he trouble himself to inquire. So, on the other hand, we can examine and come to the certainty of the existence of things, without knowing, or attempting to know, their natures and properties. The peasant knows there is a Sun and a Moon, as well as the astronomers; and his certainty, as to their existence, is as great and as well-grounded as theirs. Nor is this only true in things which are objects of sense, but will hold likewise with respect to such things, the existence of which we collect from reason. From visible effects to invisible causes the argument is conclusive; though in many cases it extends only to the reality of the cause, and does not in the least lead us to the knowledge of the nature of it. When we see distempers cured by the use of plants or of drugs, some virtue we are sure there is in them, upon which the effect depends, though what we seldom or never can tell. This being the case then, That we can arrive at the knowledge of the existence of things, when we are perfectly ignorant of their natures and properties; and can, on the other side, examine and know the properties of things, without considering whether they exist, or no; 'tis plain that these are distinct acts of knowledge, which do not depend on each other, and that we may be certain as to the reality of things, however we may be puzzled and confounded when we enter into the consideration of their nature.

And now pray consider, as to the case before us, what sort of knowledge it is that

that is necessary to support religion in the world. If we are sure there is a God who will judge the world, is not that a sufficient foundation for holiness? Does it signify any thing, as to the necessity of our obedience, to inquire into the manner or nature of his being? Does not the whole religion evidently depend on this question, Whether there certainly be a God who will judge the world? And, if it appears there is, is it of any consequence to say, there are great difficulties in conceiving how these things can be? For, if they certainly will be, they will be some way or other, no doubt; and it concerns not us to know which way. Since therefore our Saviour has given the greatest evidence that can be of the certainty of a future state, and the soul's existence after death, 'tis impertinent and unphilosophical to confront this evidence with difficulties arising from our conceptions as to the nature and manner of these things: It is in truth to set up ignorance against knowledge; for our difficulties spring from our ignorance of nature, which is an argument we ought rather to be ashamed of, than to bring into competition with the clear evidence we have for the certainty and reality of the things themselves. Were this duly considered, it would set the great controversy of religion upon the right foot, which ought to turn on this single point, Whether there be sufficient evidence of a future state, or no? For, if such a state there be, let our conceptions concerning it be clear, or not clear, most certainly we shall be brought to account for all we do; which is enough, I think, to make us careful what we do. And this is the main concern of religion, and that which will secure whatever is necessary to it.

Since then religion evidently depends upon the certainty and reality of a future state of rewards and punishments, and other the like articles, and not in the least upon the knowledge of the nature, or the philosophical account of these things; it had been absurd in our Saviour, who was a preacher of religion only, a teacher sent from God, to have entered into those difficulties, which did not at all belong to his province. And, since neither the practice of religion would have received any advantage by the dis-

cussion of these doubts, for, if we had the knowledge of angels, and saw the heavens as plainly as they do, yet the same virtue and holiness, without any change, would be necessary to carry us thither; nor the motives of religion would have gained any new strength, since the evidence for the reality of a future state is not affected by these doubts; it is ridiculous to expect the solution of them in the gospel, when, if solved, they would not serve any one point in which the gospel is concerned, but would end in mere philosophy and speculation.

But perhaps it may be said, that all this is true indeed, where the existence of things is out of doubt: in that case no difficulties can destroy the evidence of their existence. But, where the existence of things is doubtful, there the seeming contradictions which arise in considering the nature of the things, do mightily shake the presumption of their existence. This is a fair state of the case, and we ought to join issue on it.

Let us then proceed, in the third place, to shew, that the gospel has given us the greatest evidence of our own immortality, and of a future state, that can be thought on or desired. There are two things upon which our resurrection to life depends, as we learn from our Saviour's answer to the Sadducees: *Ye do err, says he, not knowing the scriptures, nor the power of God*: which answer is a very clear one; for we can desire no more than to know that God certainly can raise us, and that he certainly will. The first is to be learnt from our natural notions of God; the second from the scripture, which is the declaration of his will to mankind. As to the power of God, it cannot be brought into question, without throwing off all pretence even to natural religion: for, if you allow God, that he made the world, and formed man into a living soul in the beginning; you cannot deny but that He, who made man out of nothing at first, can as easily make him again, after death has dissolved the vital union. It remains then to inquire after the will of God, Whether He, who certainly can, certainly will raise us at the last day? The time will not permit me to enter largely into the argument; and therefore I shall rest it upon one, but that a very clear point. It will not be denied but that we have our Saviour's promise

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S E R M O N XII.

The same Subject concluded.

MATTHEW, xi. 6.

Blessed is he whosoever shall not be offended in me.

THE prejudices which men are apt to conceive against the gospel, are of different kinds, according to the different views under which they consider it. When they set themselves to examine the pretensions it has to be a divine revelation,

they stumble at the meanness and poverty of its Author; imagining that, if God were to send a person into the world upon so considerable an errand, he would clothe him with a majesty becoming one immediately commissioned by himself, and which might better support the great undertaking: Or, if they consider the gospel as the word of God, given to men for their instruction in all things pertaining to the service of God, they expect to find all their doubts and difficulties removed, which are any way related to the cause of religion; such, for instance, as relate to the nature of the soul, its manner of subsisting out of the body, and to the nature and condition of the future state which we are bid to expect: And, not finding these difficulties considered and removed, they are apt to conclude that this revelation has not all the marks of wisdom which are to be expected in one coming immediately from God.

These offences have been already considered: But, as some are offended at the gospel for not clearing the doubts and difficulties which encumbered the notions of religion before, so others take offence at the new doctrines introduced into religion by the gospel, and complain of the hardship put upon them in requiring them to believe things which are not suggested to them by natural reason, nor are to be maintained by it. Even of our Saviour's disciples we find many offended at his doctrine, and complaining to each other, *This is an hard saying; who can bear it?* And so far did their prejudice prevail, *that they went back, and walked no more with him*.

The gospel, it is said, contains many mysterious truths: And what purpose of religion can be served by our receiving articles of faith which we do not understand? Shall we be the better men for it? Will it make us more just, or holy, or beneficent to our brethren? Will it promote the honour of God to represent him as requiring such conditions from us, the end or use of which we cannot discern? Or, will it recommend religion to the world? Will men be the more forward to submit, when they must first renounce their sense and understanding, and cease to be rational, in order to be religious?

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SERMON XII.

The same Subject concluded.

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This is a very heavy charge, and, were it as true as it is heavy, might possibly shake

shake the foundations of the gospel. But, to set this matter in a clear light, I must desire you to observe the different notions which belong to the word *Mystery* in the use of the gospel, and in vulgar use among men at this time: And, by thus distinguishing the use or sense of the word, it will appear,

First, That the objection does not reach the gospel sense or use of the word, nor can affect the mysteries contained in the gospel: And,

Secondly, That the use and sense of the word, which is liable to this objection, does not any way belong to the gospel; nor are there any such mysteries in the gospel as may justify the complaint made against them.

First then, If you look into the sacred Writers, you will find, That the whole design of the gospel, the dispensation of Providence in the salvation of mankind, is styled a mystery; *the hidden wisdom of God, which was kept secret since the world began*: A mystery 'tis called, because it was kept secret since the world began, God not having opened or declared his gracious purposes before the coming of Christ. With respect to this time of secrecy and silence, the gospel is called a mystery; but, upon the revelation of it by Christ Jesus, it is no longer looked upon as a mystery, but as the manifestation of God's will and goodness to men. Thus you will find St. Paul speaking in the last of the Romans: *The mystery which was kept secret since the world began, but now is made manifest, and by the scriptures of the Prophets, according to the commandment of the everlasting God, made known to all nations for the obedience of faith*: That is, this great work was a mystery in all ages, being kept secret in the counsels of God; but, since the coming of Christ, 'tis no longer a mystery, but is manifest and made known to all nations and people. Here then, you see plainly, the opposition is between mystery and revelation: What God has reserved to himself, without communicating the knowledge of it to the world, that is a mystery; what he has revealed, is no longer a mystery, but a manifestation of his will and purpose. In this sense, I presume, there lies no objection against the gospel: That it was once hidden in the secret counsels of Pro-

vidence, but is now, by the revelation of Christ Jesus, made known to all men, can afford us no matter of complaint, but may administer to us great joy, and be a subject of praise and glory to God; inasmuch as our eyes have seen, and our ears heard, those things, which many righteous men and prophets have *desired to see, and have not seen them, and to hear, and have not heard them*.

As the gospel itself is in this sense styled a mystery, so are the several parts of it likewise: *I shew you a mystery*, says St. Paul; *we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed*. He did not mean that he would shew them what they could not comprehend, but that he would declare to them the purpose of God, which they were ignorant of. The same use of the word you may meet with in our blessed Saviour himself: When he had described the future state of the church in parables to the Jews, and came afterwards to explain them to the disciples, he tells them the reason of his proceeding: *Because*, says he, *unto you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but unto them it is not given*. All futurities, because known only to God, are mysteries; but, when revealed, they are no longer so, being made known and manifest. Thus, 'tis plain, St. Paul uses the word in 1 Cor. xiii. where he joins the gift of prophecy and the knowledge of mysteries together: *Though I have*, says he, *the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge*: Where 'tis plain what he means by mysteries, since they are to be understood by the gift of prophecy. In the fourth chapter of the same epistle he shews what account we are to make of our pastors and teachers; *Let a man*, says he, *so account of us, as of the ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God*. His meaning is not, that they were preachers of mysteries in the vulgar notion of it, that is, of things which nobody can understand; but that God had entrusted them with his purposes and intentions in the salvation of mankind, which they, like good stewards, were to dispense to the whole family, by declaring and revealing the whole will of God.

The same Apostle says, Chap. ii. 7. *We speak the wisdom of God in a mystery*; and in the next words explains what he

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means by mystery, *even the hidden wisdom which God ordained before the world to our glory*: and in the tenth verse he tells us, this is no longer hidden, but the mystery is laid open; *God having revealed it unto us by his Spirit*. In the same sense we read of the *mystery of faith*; where we are not to understand the Apostle to mean incomprehensible articles of faith, but the revelations of God's purposes and designs, which through faith we receive, and are therefore styled the mysteries of faith.

In this sense the gospel is full of mysteries, as containing the secret purposes of God's hidden wisdom in the redemption of the world, which were made manifest by Christ Jesus, *who brought life and immortality to light*. Against this gospel sense of mystery the common objections have no force; since mysteries here are not understood to be such things as reason cannot receive, but such things as proceed from the hidden wisdom of God, and are made manifest in the gospel of Christ.

Let us then, in the second place, proceed to shew, that the notion of mysteries, against which the objection lies, does not belong to the gospel. The objection represents a mystery as a thing inconceivable, and altogether irreconcilable to human reason. But such mysteries there are none in the gospel of Christ. If men, learned or unlearned, have run themselves into contradictions by endeavouring to explain the mysteries of God farther than he has explained them, be that to themselves: let not the gospel be charged with their errors and mistakes. Nothing indeed has proved more fatal to religion, than the vain attempts of men to dive into the unrevealed mysteries of God, and to account for, upon principles of human reason, the things which proceed from the hidden wisdom of God. All the secret purposes of Providence are, in the sense of the scripture, mysteries; as likewise all knowledge which God has not revealed. Of such mysteries are there many: but then they concern not us to

inquire after; if they did, God would reveal them to us. God has declared to us, that he has an only-begotten Son, and that he was the person who came down from heaven for our deliverance: that he has an Holy Spirit, who shall sanctify our hearts, and be assisting to us in working out our salvation. This, and agreeable to this, is the scripture doctrine: and a man would be put to it to fix any absurdity, or so much as seeming contradiction, upon this doctrine, or any thing said concerning it in scripture. Concerning these persons there are indeed exceeding great mysteries, which are not revealed: God has not told us, or enabled us to conceive, how his Son and his Spirit dwell in him, or how they came from him. These therefore are properly mysteries, which are hidden in the secret wisdom of God, and which we are nowhere called upon to inquire after. It is easy, I think, to take God's word, that he has a Son and a Spirit, who dwell with him and in him from all eternity; a Son who came to our assistance, a Spirit who is ever with us to guide us into truth: these things, I say, are easy to be believed, without entering into the difficulties arising from natural and philosophical inquiries, which the scripture nowhere encourages us to seek after: and, as long as men keep close to the rule and doctrine of scripture, they will find no cause to enter into the great complaints raised against mysteries. The scripture has revealed indeed wonderful things to us, and for the truth of them has given us as wonderful evidence; so that they are well qualified to be the objects of our faith: for such God designed them, and not for the exercise of our vanity and curiosity, or, as you call it, of our reason. If it is not reasonable to believe God upon the gospel evidence, there is an end of all mysteries; but, if it is reasonable, there must be an end of all farther inquiries: and I think common sense will teach us not to call God to account, or pretend to enter into the reason of his doings.

S E R M O N XIII.

By ARCHBISHOP SECKER.

Examine fairly, adhere to that which is good, and shun all Evil.

1 THESS. v. 21, 22.

Prove all things: hold fast that which is good: abstain from all appearance of evil.

By the extensive word, *all*, the apostle in this place evidently means no more, than *all things* which may be right or wrong in point of conscience. And by *proving them* he means, not that we should try them both by experience, which would be an absurd and pernicious direction: but that we should examine them by our faculty of judgement, which is a wise and useful exhortation. Accordingly, Christianity recommends itself to us at first sight by this peculiar presumption of its being the true religion, that it makes application to men as reasonable creatures, and claims our assent on account of the proofs, which it offers. By these alone it prevailed originally: on these it still relies; and requires faith for the principle of our obedience, only because it produces evidence for the ground of our faith. Now such an institution surely is entitled to receive the fair treatment which it gives, when it asks of mankind no more than this; that they should first consider well the several obligations they are under; then adhere to whatever they find to be enjoined them; and lastly avoid whatever they conceive to be forbidden: which momentous duties I shall endeavour to explain and enforce in three discourses on the text.

That beings, capable of thought, are obliged to think, is very obvious; that they should think with the greatest care on subjects of the greatest importance, is equally so; and the question, what obligations we are under, is plainly of the utmost importance. For our behaviour, and consequently our happiness, depends on the determination of it. Therefore we are just as much bound to conduct our understanding well, as our

temper or outward actions. And the opportunities given us of showing, either diligence in procuring information, and fairness in judging upon it, or the contrary, are trials, which God hath appointed, of every one's moral character; and perhaps the chief trials, which some have to go through. Every instance, greater or less, of wilfully disregarding truth, instead of seeking and embracing it, argues a proportionable depravity of heart; whether the dislike be manifested in a studious opposition to it, or an indolent scorn of it.

There are some who openly profess an utter contempt of all inquiry: despise such as are solicitous either about belief or practice, and even affect a thoughtlessness, which they find to be grown fashionable. Now really, if this be an accomplishment, it is one, that whoever will may easily be master of. But surely men ought to think seriously once for all, before they resolve for the rest of their days to think no more. There are strong appearances, that many things of great consequence are incumbent on us. No one can be sure, that these appearances are fallacious, till he hath examined into them. Many, who have, are fully persuaded of their truth. And, if there be such things in the world as folly and guilt, it can never be either wise or innocent to disdain giving ourselves any trouble about the matter, and take it absolutely for granted, that we may live as we will: a decision of such a nature, that were it made on seemingly ever so good grounds, it would be very fit to review them well from time to time, for fear of a mistake that must be fatal.

And if a general neglect of considering our conduct be criminal, a neglect of considering any part of it must, in its degree, be criminal also. Many have weighed carefully, and observe conscientiously, some duties of life; but will not reflect a moment, whether it be allowable for them to behave, in other points, as they do. And yet, if any moral obligation deserves regard, every such obligation deserves it equally. And when the question comes to be, what is indeed such, and what not, impartial reason, well directed, must be judge; not inclination or fancy: for if these can make

make things lawful, nothing will be unlawful. And therefore, instead of ever following such guides implicitly, we should always have the greater suspicion that we are going wrong, the more vehemently they press us to go forward.

Some again have searched, and obtained satisfaction, they say, concerning every article of morals; but will not concern themselves about religion. Yet surely the inquiry, whether there be a wise and just ruler of this universe or not; and if there be, what homage he expects from us; and what we have to hope or fear from him, according as we pay it, or refuse it; is as material a one, as ever was made. And on what pretence any one can doubt whether it be worth making, and reverently too, it is impossible to say.

Another sort declare, that they have a settled conviction of natural religion, (would God they would ask their hearts, what feelings of it they cultivate, what marks of it they show,) but treat revelation at the same time, as totally unworthy of being considered. Yet that our heavenly Father can give us very useful information both of what we did not know before, and of what we could not know else, is at least as credible, as it is certain that we can give such one to another. And that he may with justice give some men greater advantages than others by supernatural discoveries, is no less clear than that he may give them such advantages by their natural abilities and circumstances. If then God may do this for us, it is a most interesting question, whether he hath or not; and an indispensable precept, which the words, immediately preceding the text, express when joined with it. *Despise not prophecies: prove all things.*

But there is yet a different set of persons, who confess, that both our attention, and our assent, are due to Christianity in general, but who are against discussing any of its doctrines in particular. Provided men know but enough of it, to keep them well-behaved and quiet, nothing further, they conceive, is needful; whatever sentiments about speculative points happen to prevail, should be supported, and no disputes allowed to break in upon the peace of the world. Now, it is very true, that society should

not be disturbed by contentions about opinions, as it hath often been most dreadfully: nor men be perplexed about questions of mere curiosity, instead of learning better things; nor frightened, or estranged from each other by laying stress on points of mere nicety. And the New Testament strongly forbids all these things. But still, if the Christian religion be from Heaven, it cannot be a matter of indifference, what its real doctrines are: nor can its Author have given us the liberty of professing others in their stead. Some of them may seem, and perhaps may be, though that doth not follow, of small consequence to the purposes of common life: but if they convey to us just notions of God, and of those relations of ours to him, which are never the less real for not being discoverable by reason; if they instruct us in the duties which those relations require, and form us to that state of mind, which he knows to be requisite for enjoying the happiness of another world, be their connection with this world ever so little, surely they are important enough. Some of them also have doubts and difficulties attending them; as even the doctrines of natural religion, and the duties of morality have: but these were intended to furnish us with opportunities of shewing uprightness in judging, where we are qualified to judge; and humility in submitting our shallow imaginations to unfathomable wisdom, where we are not; the exercise of which virtues here will fit us for a plentiful reward hereafter. And would men but once prevail on themselves to express their thoughts on controverted subjects with decency and candour; society, instead of suffering by debates, would receive much benefit: Christianity would be better understood; and therefore more justly esteemed, and more discreetly practised: it would be built on firmer foundations, and therefore be securer against all assaults.

There still remains a larger number of Christians, I mean the advocates of the church of Rome, who are indeed by no means indifferent what doctrines are held, but vehemently oppose entering into any disquisitions about them; and would have us, instead of that, first look out for an infallible guide, and then fol-

low him blindfold. But they have never been able to show, that such infallibility exists amongst men; or even to agree with each other determinately, in whom they should place it. And the scripture, far from directing us to examine this one claim, and after that never to examine more, directs us in many places, but particularly in the text, by as plain words as can be written, to *prove* that is, examine, *all things*. But were this otherwise, their pretension will require no long examination: for it is in vain to argue that such or such men cannot mistake, when it notoriously appears in fact, that they have mistaken.

Every article therefore both of morals and religion may and ought to be tried, in such manner as can be reasonably expected from the parts, attainments and circumstances of each person: and concerning this, we should both judge modestly for ourselves, and consult others with deference. For attempting too much will be more likely to mislead, than improve us.

But then the more general and important this duty of inquiry is, the more care must be taken to perform it aright. For many pique themselves on a most unbounded zeal for freedom of thought, and a thorough search into things, who yet by no means deserve the character which they assume.

Some of them fancy they have thought very freely upon religion. Now this is, in one sense, treating it freely indeed, but no proof of thinking upon it at all. For mere disbelieving is no more an evidence of having examined, than mere believing is. However, at least, they say, they have thrown off the prejudices in which they were bred up: and throwing off prejudices must be right. But then they are many of them for extirpating, under that odious name, original natural dispositions in the heart of man. For instance: the propensity, that we all experience to revere an invisible power; the esteem that we all feel of justice and truth, of mercy and goodness, of honour and decency; are as real constituents of our inward frame, as any passion or appetite that belongs to it. Yet these principles, which direct us to every thing that is good, they would persuade us to root out as prejudices; while they plead earnestly for the

inclinations, that continually prompt us to vice, as dictates of nature. And a part of our nature undoubtedly they are: but a part lamentably disordered; and which, in its best estate, the other and higher was evidently designed to govern and restrain. At least, to set out with taking the contrary for granted; and condemn things at once, as groundless prepossessions, which have so respectable an appearance of being the primitive guides of life, is by no means inquiring freely.

Another false notion concerning prejudices, though at first sight a plausible one, is, that we ought to divest ourselves of all desire to find religion true, before we go about to judge of it. Now it is impossible, that a person of a worthy mind should do so. He may indeed, and will take care, not to be misled by his desire. But he neither can, nor ought to be indifferent concerning a point, on which his own eternal happiness, and that of every good man upon earth, depends. Nor is this the only case, far from it, in which we are bound to wish on one side, and yet determine fairly between both. In judicial proceedings, a benevolent magistrate will constantly wish, that whoever is accused before him may prove innocent: notwithstanding which, he will try his cause with the most upright impartiality.

But if this degree of prepossession in favour of religion be right, how exceedingly wrong must prepossession against it be! What are we to think of those, and what have they cause to think of themselves, who can take pleasure in that comfortless and horrid view of things, which infidelity gives; and triumph in believing, that *there is no reward for the righteous, no God that judgeth the earth!* (Psalm. lviii. 10.) One would hope they do not see distinctly, and yet it is exceedingly visible, what malevolence to human kind rejoicing in a thought of this nature implies.

Or if they do not wish against religion in general, yet, if they wish against the Christian religion, they are enemies to a doctrine, which confirms very powerfully all the great truths that reason teaches; which clears up, intirely to our advantage, many tormenting doubts, that reason leaves us involved in; and which, however it may have been perverted,

verted, (as every good thing in the world hath,) undeniably is in its nature an institution the most completely fitted to make men happy in themselves and one another, in the present state and the future, that ever was. Did we then see those, who profess themselves unsatisfied about its evidence, afraid it was insufficient; grieved that the proofs appeared no stronger, and the objections so considerable; this would shew a mind, which the Scripture calls *noble*, (Acts, xvii. 2.) *not far from the kingdom of God*. (Mark, xii. 34.) And at times, they most of them affect to seem thus disposed; and will assure such as press them upon the subject, that, of all things, they wish they could but be so happy as to believe. But why then were they in such haste to disbelieve, and most of them to act viciously upon their disbelief? Why would they not hear and consider first? Why will they not now reconsider the subject, and acquaint themselves with the defences of our faith, as well as the attacks made upon it? Why do they delight in making converts of all that they can? Why are they so prone to ridicule or calumniate those whom they cannot? Such symptoms look very suspicious; and should induce those, who are conscious of them, to put the question home to themselves, whether this great good-will to religion be really the temper with which they have ever inquired into it, or do now inwardly think of it; or whether indeed their professions are only a specious manner of talking, occasionally taken up to serve a turn. If the latter be the case, they must, in order to be fair doubters, guard against another sort of prejudices, than they imagined.

Some prejudices, either right or wrong, will take hold of us very soon. And therefore it is fit, that, as far as we can, we should examine the foundation of our early opinions; but with equity, with candour, not with a resolution beforehand to find fault: for as they are never the truer for our being educated in them, they are never the falser either. But indeed the education of many hath placed them so very little in the way, either of receiving prejudices, or hearing arguments in favour of religion; that they have need to begin with throwing off prejudices to its disadvantage

and should suspect that much more may be said for it, than the little, which hath come to their knowledge. It is probable, that they might have some impressions of piety, such as they were, made upon them by the superintendents of their childhood; and it is possible that something may have been added since to these impressions, by their attendance, if haply they have been suffered to attend, on public instruction. But as soon as they begin to see a little more of the world, and observe what passes around them, what a number of things will they meet with, likely to give them a much stronger bias towards infidelity, than the forms of a common education have given them towards faith! They will find but too many declared unbelievers, and even teachers of unbelief: very many, who, if they do not expressly deny Christianity, speak and act as if they despised it; and few, in comparison, that vouchsafe it a serious and uniform regard. The abuses of religion they will hear most invidiously magnified; the benefits of it most artfully and maliciously depreciated; the public worship of God condemned, as idle formality; the private, as enthusiastic folly; the ministers of his word represented as objects only of contempt or abhorrence: and the consequence hath been, that, by thinking of us in a manner, which, with all our faults, God forbid we should deserve, multitudes are come to think of the gospel, that we preach, in a manner, which they certainly ought not, did we deserve ever so ill. When prejudices from without, like these, are added to the vehement ones within, which vanity forms against every thing that would humble it, and passions and appetites against every thing that would restrain them; it is easy to perceive, where the danger of partiality lies; and what prepossessions the company they have kept, the books they have read, the lives they have led, make necessary to be banished by too many, if they would become fair enquirers.

Let it therefore be examined, on what foundation the notions, that we have learned, of religion and virtue, stand. But let it be examined also, on what foundation the prevailing notions, which contradict religion and virtue stand. For to lay it down as a maxim,

that these are well grounded, and discard the former merely on that presumption, is monstrously unreasonable. We own it to be highly proper, that men should ask themselves, why they believe: but it is equally proper for them to ask, why they disbelieve. Undoubtedly they should not be bigots and zealots; but then they should not be so against religion, any more than for it. Implicit faith is wrong: but implicit infidelity is yet more so. And whatever fault may be found with the trust, which it is said the godly repose in their spiritual guides; it is full as possible, and perhaps in proportion full as frequent, for the ungodly to follow one another on to their lives end, with their eyes close shut, each in the most servile reliance on what his leader tells him; only with the ridiculous addition of admiring most immoderately, all the way, their own wonderful freedom of thought.

By such considerations as these, men should prepare their minds for beginning to inquire. And when they do begin, it is an important rule, not to be too hasty in drawing conclusions, especially bold ones. Viewing things on every side, observing how far consequences reach, and proceeding to collect and hear evidence, till reason faith there needs no more, is grievous labour to indolence and impatience, and by no means answers the ends of conceit and affectation. A shorter way therefore is commonly taken. Some objection of minute philosophy strikes their thoughts unexpectedly, or comes recommended to them as highly fashionable: and whether a solid answer can be given to it, they never ask. Some argument, urged in favour of religion, proves or seems to be a weak one; and, without more ado, they infer, that the rest are no stronger. Some things, which have been generally received, they find or apprehend are false or doubtful; and therefore nothing, they imagine, is certain. Some text of scripture, possibly transcribed or translated amiss, is hard to defend, or to reconcile with some other; and therefore they slight the whole. Some doctrine, which revelation is said to teach, appears hard to understand or admit, or is capable of a ludicrous turn; and therefore immediately they reject, not only that, but others not in the least

connected with it; throw aside at once the intire system; and, it may be, plunge headlong into vice. Yet, all the while, revelation perhaps doth not teach this doctrine, and they are offended solely at a phantom of their own dressing up; or perhaps teaches it with great reason, for any thing which they can ever prove to the contrary. For in a nature so unsearchable as that of God, and a scheme so vast as that of his universal government, there must be many things, which creatures of our limited faculties cannot approach towards comprehending; and, merely for want of comprehending, may fancy to be full of incredibilities, which, could we but know more, or would we but remember that we know so little, would instantly vanish. In matters therefore, which we understand so very imperfectly, to set up human imagination against divine authority; to rely on crude notions, that things are impossible, which proper testimony shews to be true in fact; or that God cannot be, or do, what, by his own declarations, he is, and hath done, betrays a disposition widely distant from the modesty which becomes us.

Besides, were the difficulties which attend the system of religion, more considerable than they are; yet we should take notice, that difficulties attend the contrary system also; and consider, since one must be true, which is most likely to be so. If there be objections against a creation and a providence; are there not greater against supposing, that the world could have existed without being created, or continue all this time without a providence? If there be somewhat scarce conceivable in the doctrine of a future life and judgement: yet upon the whole, which of the two is most probable, that a wise and good God will finally recompense men according to their works, or that he will not? If there be things in the Gospel-Revelation, for which it is hard to account, is it so hard to account for any thing upon earth, as how it should come to have such astonishing proofs, internal and external, of being true, if it be really false? They who think the creed of a Christian so strange and mysterious, let them think a while, what the creed of an infidel must be, if he would only lay aside his general pretences of imposture and enthusiasm,

thusiasm, and credulity and bigotry, which thrown out at random will discredit all evidence of history alike; and answer in particular, how, on his own hypothesis, he accounts for all the several notorious facts, on which our religion is built. I am persuaded, there hath never appeared yet amongst men so incomprehensible a collection of tenets, as this would produce. Men may indeed be too easy of belief: but it is just as great a weakness to be too full of suspicion. Reverence for antiquity may impose upon us: but fondness for novelty may do the same thing. Undoubtedly we should be on the watch against pious frauds; but against impious ones too. For whatever dishonesty the advocates of religion have been either justly or unjustly charged with, the opposers of it have given full proof, at least of their inclination not to come short of them. Whoever therefore would proceed in the right path, must be attentive to the dangers on each side.

Perhaps this may seem to require more pains than most persons are capable of. But of an upright disposition every one is capable: and with this, common abilities and leisure will suffice to judge concerning the necessary points of faith and practice. Few indeed, or none, can judge of any thing without relying in some measure on the knowledge and veracity of others. And what must we think of human nature, or what will become of human society, if we can take nothing on each other's word? We should hearken to no one, indeed, who asserts plain absurdities. And we should always judge for ourselves as far as we can. But we should not affect to do it farther. Where we visibly want, either parts or learning, or time for it, as we frequently do in worldly affairs of great moment, no less than in religion, we are both allowed and obliged to depend on others. Only we must observe these two directions; that we first pay a due respect to that legal authority, under which Providence hath placed us: and then chuse, according to the best of our understandings, the worthiest and wisest and most considerate persons to be our conductors. For as we should never hastily run after uncommissioned guides, so above all things we should be aware of artful or self-sufficient, of rash and

impetuous ones: which last, however it happens, men are peculiarly apt to follow, though almost sure of being led by them, not only wrong, but great lengths in what is wrong: whereas there are no plainer rules of behaviour than these, that in proportion as we are in the dark, we should go on gently; and wherever there may be hazard, keep on the safer side.

He that will conduct himself thus, may soon make large advances in religious knowledge: and wherever he stops, needs not be uneasy. Though the arguments, which he hath for his faith, may not be the strongest: yet a tree, but weakly rooted, often brings forth good fruit; and if it doth, will never be hewn down, and cast into the fire. (Matth. iii. 10. vii. 19.) Though he may be ignorant of many things, and doubt or even err concerning many others, yet they may be of small importance; or, though of great, yet having used a competent care to inform himself, he will obtain pardon. We cannot indeed say with exactness, how much of their time and pains men are bound to spend upon examination, any more than how much of their wealth in works of charity, and the less, as both duties vary according to the circumstances of every individual. But let each consult his conscience, with a serious desire of being told the truth, whether it hath been, and is now, his habitual endeavour to determine and to act as rightly as he can: and, if the answer be clearly in his favour, when he is neither disposed to frighten nor flatter himself, let him trust in God, and be at peace. (Job, xxii. 21.) For like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him. (Psal. ciii. 13.)

Not that, after all, it is indifferent, whether we fall into errors concerning religion, or escape them. For both mistakes and bare ignorance, where they are accompanied with little or no guilt, may often be followed by great disadvantages. Wrong notions in the understanding may produce wrong movements in the heart; which, even when they will not bring down upon us future punishment, may unfit us for certain degrees of future reward. And, on the contrary, a larger portion of piety and

virtue, and therefore of heavenly felicity, may prove to be the natural consequence of a more extensive acquaintance with gospel truths. So that, in the reason of things, as well as the sure foundation of divine promises, good Christians are entitled to expect those distinguished glories in a better world, for which, others, though, in proportion to their talents, truly good, may not be qualified.

But still it is allowable to hope, and to rejoice in hoping, that a Being unspeakably gracious will confer some measure of happiness hereafter on all the sons of men, who have not made themselves incapable of it; and that neither involuntary nor excusable misapprehensions will exclude any from it. If indeed, under colour of reasoning freely, men will argue fallaciously, conclude precipitately, and behave presumptuously; talk and do what they please without modesty or fear; and set themselves up, on this merit, for the only assertors of liberty, when in truth they are willing slaves to a wicked mind; these, of all men, *have no cloak for their sin.* (John, xv. 22.) But the virtuous and humble inquirer, who studies to conduct his understanding with impartial care first, and his life with inoffensive sincerity afterwards, yet, conscious of his many failings, begs for pardon and strength to be given him in such manner as his Maker sees fit, may surely comfort himself with pleasing expectations of acceptance after death. *As many therefore, as walk according to this rule, peace be on them, and mercy, and upon the Israel of God.* (Gal. vi. 16.)

S E R M O N XIV.

The same Subject continued.

I THESS. v. 21, 22.

Prove all things: hold fast that which is good: abstain from all appearance of evil.

THE first duty of reasonable creatures, with respect to religion, is, informing themselves, as fully as their natural abilities, their improvements in knowledge, and their conditions of life permit, concerning its truth, and the doctrines it teaches. Multitudes are unable to proceed far in this inquiry: of the rest, some totally neglect it, some carry it on

with less care and integrity, or fewer advantages, than others. And hence it comes to pass, that different persons think upon the subject in very different manners: and even the same person, in progress of time, very differently from himself. But then every state of mind, that men can be in, relative to these matters, hath its proper obligations belonging to it: and, for want of paying due regard to them, they whose opinions are right may be very bad in their practice; and they whose opinions are wrong, much worse, than even their own notions, by any just consequence, allow them to be. Not uncommonly indeed the goodness of men's nature prevails, through God's mercy, in some points, over the ill tendency of their principles; and makes them better, than they profess themselves. But much oftener they run into such behaviour, as must be unwarrantable, according to the very doctrines which they have embraced. And therefore every one should consider well, to what sort of conduct these really direct him, and from what they restrain him. Men may think, they could not help being of the opinions they are: but if they take still greater liberties, than their opinions lead them to; instead of suspecting, that possibly they may lead them too far: this they must know to be their own fault; and, while they indulge it, one doth not see, what they will stop at: whereas keeping carefully within the bounds, which their judgment sets them, will be the best excuse they can have, in their present way of thinking; and the likeliest means of discerning and amending the errors of it.

Having therefore laid before you, in the first place, the duty of *proving all things*, and the general disposition of mind with which it should be done: I proceed now to the consequent duty, of *holding fast that which is good*, and *abstaining from all appearance of evil*. And as the appearances of good and evil must vary, according to the notions which are espoused about them; it will be useful to consider those of unbelievers, as well as believers: for which purpose, there must be some extraordinary suppositions made; but I hope the truly pious will neither think them shocking, nor useless; being introduced only for the sake of suggesting to them such things, as though they want

want not for themselves, or for others like them, they may perhaps employ to good effect for convincing or silencing infidels and libertines, when occasion requires; and there hath seldom been more occasion that at present.

To begin then with imagining a worse case, than perhaps is possible. Were any one persuaded, not only that all religion is groundless, but that virtue and vice, right and wrong, are mere words without meaning: yet even such a one, if he did not think wisdom and folly, pleasure and pain, empty sounds too; would have some rule of conduct, so far as it reached. Still it would be matter of serious consideration, what behaviour promises the most happiness, upon the whole, to such beings, placed in such a world, as we are. And our present interest here, had we no other guide, far from permitting us to do every mad thing, that passion, appetites, or fancies, prompt us to, would direct us, in a great measure, to a course of honesty, friendliness and sobriety. For not only life and health, and safety and quiet; of which no other method can possibly give us, in general, near so good a prospect; are of much too high importance, to be hazarded wantonly: but reputation also is a matter of no small value; and peace within of greater still. Now suppose there were no reason in the least for any one to feel satisfaction in doing good-natured and just things, or uneasiness from the reflection of having done cruel and base ones; yet, as in fact, almost, if not absolutely, all persons do feel both: to aim at the former, and avoid the latter, is, without regard to principle, a dictate of common prudence.

But farther, whatever some may think of moral obligation themselves, they have many reasons to desire, that the world about them should think highly of it. For though discretion, abstracted from sense of duty, might reasonably, in most cases, restrain those, with whom we are concerned from using us ill; yet it will restrain them but in few instances; and then very imperfectly. So that whoever is considerate, will be extremely unwilling to weaken the bonds of human society; which he will find, at best, are by no means too strong. And therefore, should he think it his own interest to be wicked; yet, if he be wise, he will never attempt to make one single person like him, be-

sides those whom he absolutely needs for associates: and even of such he will beware: For he hath *taught them an evil lesson against himself.* (Ecclus. ix. 1.) But spreading his opinions farther, he will look on as the filliest of vanities; and be earnestly desirous, that others should act upon principle, whatever he doth himself: that his friends should be faithful and affectionate, his servants honest and careful, his children dutiful and regular. And they, who, in the fancied superiority of their knowledge, teach those about them, or those with whom they converse, to be profligate; by expressing, either designedly or carelessly, a contempt of virtue, well deserve the return they often meet with, for such instructions.

Nay indeed every prudent man, be his private way of thinking ever so bad, will be solicitous to preserve in the world, not only morals, but, for the sake of morals, what is the main support of them, religion too; and that religion, which is the likeliest to support them: though he conceive it to be false, he will respect it as beneficial. Were he to imagine this or that part of it hurtful, he would still moderate his zeal against them, so as not to destroy the influence of the rest. For if believing some things may do harm in the world, believing others may do good. And if any thing whatever can do much good, and no harm, it is the persuasion, that we live continually under the eye of an infinitely powerful and wise, just and good Ruler; who hath sent us a person of inconceivable dignity, on purpose to give us the fullest assurance of his rewarding all, who shall repent and amend, and punishing all who continue in wickedness, both here and to eternity. To do or say what may weaken the impressions of such a doctrine, must, on all suppositions, be the grossest folly. And yet some, who have the highest opinion of their own understandings, are perpetually guilty of it: and seem not to discern, how impossible it is, that the world should ever be influenced, to any good purpose, by what the daily conversation and example of those, who are likely to be reckoned the more knowing part of the world, encourage the rest to despise.

But I dwell too long on the supposition that men can be absolutely persuaded, that

that religion and virtue are nothing. For though many have wished, and some said it, when the wickedness of their lives hath driven them to that refuge; and though others may have been led, by love of singularity, or indignation against reigning superstitions, to advance the same notion; yet neither their numbers, nor their abilities, have been comparatively at all considerable: and besides, few of them appear to have thoroughly convinced themselves, at least for any time, of what they affirmed: nor is there pretence of ground for such conviction to rest on. Doubts indeed may be raised, such as they are. And therefore let us consider, in the second place, the obligations of those, who are doubtful about these matters. Now uncertainty, as it implies an apprehension that they may not be true, implies also an apprehension that they may. And the lowest degree of likelihood, the very possibility, that God is, and that virtue is his law, should in all reason have a powerful influence on the minds and conduct of men. Perhaps they fluctuate, only because they have not taken due pains to inform themselves. They are ignorant; not religion and morals destitute of proof; and instead of slighting, they should study them. Or supposing, after some inquiry, that they cannot determine: this happens in many cases, where further inquiry affords full evidence; concerning the main point at least, if not every particular. But were we to remain ever so much at a loss when we have done our best: not knowing things to be true, is an exceedingly different state from knowing them to be false; how apt soever we are to confound the one with the other. In the affairs of this world, men may be quite in suspense about matters, which yet are very important realities: and it may be of the utmost consequence to them, whether, during that suspense, they act rightly or not: nay, while it is ever so uncertain, what they are to think; it may be very clear, how they are to behave: and, by following or transgressing that rule, they may as truly deserve well or ill, as by any other part of their conduct. Why then may not the case be the same, in respect to those, who have not arrived at certainty concerning religious and moral obligations? Why may not such doubts be one part

of the trial of their behaviour; as well as other perplexities are of the behaviour of other persons?

Being profane and vicious, because they do not see clearly, is determining, instead of doubting: and determining on the side, that is not only prejudicial to all around them, but dangerous to themselves. For it is exceedingly little, were all things well considered, that we can almost ever get by wickedness: but what we may suffer by it, is infinite. The fruits of it in this life are usually found very bitter: nor is there any shadow of proof, but another may succeed it. And if there should, innocence here cannot possibly hurt us hereafter; but guilt runs a double risque; not only as uneasy reflections naturally follow it, but as farther punishment may be justly inflicted on it. The slightest sense of duty, that we can experience, should have made us at least suspect, that so peculiar a feeling as that, is not to stand for nothing in our composition. And if men will do, what they are told, by a secret voice within, they ought not; it is fit they should take the consequences, in the next world, as well as the present. For it is knowing they did ill, not knowing they should be condemned for it, that makes their condemnation just. And though acute and subtle reasoners may easily build up a specious system of doubts and questions, yet this is a poor defence to rest the whole of their beings upon: especially as men have so irresistible a conviction, that right and wrong are notions of great consequence, when their own rights are invaded; that they cannot in earnest think them idle words, or matters of indifference; when their neighbours are concerned; let them say what they will.

And therefore we may now go on to a third supposition; that men acknowledge the obligation of morals, but not of religion; and let us consider, what they are to do. They almost universally take the liberty of doing one very bold and wrong thing, of most extensive bad effect. They model their notions of morals, just according to their own fancy; and reduce them into as narrow a compass, as they think convenient. So that, while they talk very highly of virtue, they practise little or nothing of

of it; or, if they observe some duties strictly, yet others, though, it may be, scarce of less moment, but less agreeable to them, they neither regard, nor acknowledge, but hold them in utter contempt. Thus one part of the world transgresses the rules of sobriety and chastity; another lives wholly to idle and expensive amusements; a third is wickedly selfish or ill-natured in private affairs; a fourth unreasonably vehement in public ones; and yet all contrive to overlook their own faults in these points, and admire their own goodness in others: Whereas to be truly good, we must be so in every thing alike. But inclination easily prevails over principle, where it hath not the sanction of religion to strengthen it. And they, who profess nothing beyond morals, not only are destitute of that higher aid; but, though their lives fully show how much they want it, very commonly affect a scorn of it, no way to be accounted for. Suppose them doubtful even about natural religion; they must own, that, could it be proved, nothing in the world could influence men to virtue, like it. The fear of punishment, the hope of reward, from the King and Lord of all, the consciousness of living continually in his presence, reverence of his perfect holiness, love of his infinite goodness, reliance on his infinite wisdom and power, are evidently the strongest motives to right behaviour in every station, that can be proposed. They must own too, that the most thoughtful and able men in all ages, have held these motives to be well grounded; that the proofs in favour of them have considerable appearances of being conclusive: and, had they none, it would furnish no cause of triumph, but of the deepest concern to every lover of virtue. Such a one therefore, however uncertain, will abhor the thought of treating so beneficial, so respectable a doctrine with contempt and ridicule: a shocking manner, which frivolous and wrong minds are strangely fond of, on many unfit occasions; and indulging it, thoroughly misleads them from good sense and discreet conduct, in every other article of life, as well as this. On the contrary, the slightest apprehension, that there only may be a just Ruler and Judge of the world, will give every well-disposed person great serious-

ness of heart in thinking upon these subjects, and great decency in speaking of them: will incline him to seek for, and pay regard to, any degree of farther evidence concerning them, that is real, though perhaps it falls very short of what he could wish: and will engage him, in the mean time, to behave with all the caution, that becomes his present situation. For, in a case of such importance, even small suspicions ought to lay us under no small restraints. Therefore he will let nothing ever escape him, which may induce others to throw off what he only doubts of: he will never solicit them to transgress the precepts of religion, while they acknowledge its authority: (things palpably wicked, and yet commonly done:) he will much more discourage a groundless neglect, than a groundless belief and practice, of it: and he will think himself bound to act thus, not in prudence only, as even men of no principle are, but in conscience also.

These then are the duties of such, if any such there be, as admit the reality of virtue, and are doubtful concerning any thing farther. But indeed the generality of men profess to go so much farther, as to believe in natural religion, whatever they may think of Christianity. Let us therefore consider, in the fourth place, what their obligations are. And we shall find an addition of very considerable ones incumbent on them, if they deserve the title they assume, that of Deists: in which word, according to its original import, regard to the Deity is principally, if not solely, expressed. But, notwithstanding this, it hath now for a long time signified much more determinately that men do not believe in Christ, than that they do believe in God. At least, the belief of some, who would take it exceedingly ill to be called by a worse name, amounts to little more, than a general confused persuasion of some sort of first Cause; probably an intelligent, perhaps a beneficent one too: but with scarce any distinct conception of his being the moral Governor of the world; much less any serious conviction, that he expects from us a temper and conduct of piety and virtue, as the only condition and means of our obtaining happiness and avoiding misery. Now, if their faith comes short of this, they may very nearly

as well have none at all: and if it comes up to this, it binds them indispensably to be very different in their practice, from what they too commonly are: to cultivate in their hearts that fear and love, which the greatness and the goodness of God require: to pay him outwardly that homage and worship, which our compound frame and the interests of society call for: to beg of him both light to discern truth, and strength to practise it: to make diligent and upright inquiry, what rules he hath pointed out for the conduct of man: to observe them all with the strictest care, however contrary to favourite inclinations; and to endeavour, as far as their influence reaches, that others also may feel and express the same deep sense of what they owe their Maker. These are evident duties of real believers in him: Do they perform them? They talk in the highest terms of the sufficiency of reason, and the clearness with which natural light teaches every thing needful: Doth it *teach them to live soberly, righteously, and godly?* (Tit. ii. 12.) It is but too easy for them to excel, in this respect, the generality of such as claim the title of Christians. Why will they not take so honourable a method of putting us, and our profession, out of countenance? They apprehend themselves perhaps to have been far more strict and careful than we, in forming their opinions: Why will they not manifest a proportionable strictness in regulating their practice too? That would be a powerful evidence, both to the world and their own hearts, that they are sincere in their pretensions; that they do not reject the doctrines of the gospel, merely to be excused from the duties of it: nor disown every other law of life, but one within them, that they may be tied to nothing which they do not like. It would be uncharitable indeed to accuse them of this, without proof: but they would do well to examine, whether they are not guilty of it. For it is a dangerous temptation; and one thing looks peculiarly suspicious in many of them; that they have so little or no zeal for natural religion, and so vehement a zeal against revealed. Surely every one, who inwardly honours God, must be affected quite otherwise; and think both his conscience and his character concerned in showing the warmest

attachment to the former, and the mildest equity in relation to the latter. If he not only suspected, but imagined he knew the scripture-scheme to be false, still he must own it to be a falsehood with the most amazing quantity of truth in it that ever was: to give men, however it happens, beyond comparison, the rightest notions, the justest precepts, the joyfullest encouragement, both in piety and morals, that ever system did: and to have been *the light of the world* (John, viii. 12.), so far as appears, from the very beginning of it. Our only knowledge of the existence of true religion in the earliest times, is from the discoveries recorded in the Bible, as made to the Patriarchs. The Jewish dispensation afterwards was for many ages the main bulwark of faith in *one God, the Maker of heaven and earth*: nor probably was it from any other source, that the learned Heathens derived their chief acquaintance with divine truths, after they had forgotten the primitive tradition of them. Then lastly, the Christian revelation overturned, when every thing else had appeared incapable of doing it, polytheism and idolatry, immoral superstition and profligate vice, wherever it was preached: and though it was indeed perverted for a time to patronize, in some degree, what it had destroyed; yet, by the native goodness of its constitution, it recovered again: and is now professed by the church, of which we are members, in greater purity, than elsewhere upon earth, Infidels themselves being judges. If therefore they have in truth the affection, which they cannot deny but they ought to have, for genuine, moral, rational piety, they must honour this institution, as an infinitely beneficial one; whether they confess it to be from heaven, or not: and, before they even wish it disregarded, should consider, with no little seriousness, what effects must naturally follow. Would men really believe the being and providence of God, the obligations of virtue, and the recompenses of another life, the more firmly, for disbelieving the gospel? Would they understand their duty the better, for having no written rule of it? Would they judge about it the more impartially, for being left to make it out by their own fancies? Would they think of it the oftener, for never being instructed in it?

Or

Or is there not the strongest appearance, that as from Christianity all the true knowledge of religion came, which even the enemies of Christianity have to boast of: so with it, all true regard to religion would be lost again? We have been making in the present age some trial of this: and the effects, in private life and public, have been such, that it is very hard to say, why either a good or a wise man should ever want to see what a farther trial would end in. But, at least, such a one would have much more concern that men should believe and practise what reason and nature teach, than that they should not believe and practise what revelation teaches. And even if he could think himself obliged to declare against the latter, be the consequences bad as they will, for the sake of what he imagines truth; (which yet unbelievers are not apt to consider as a point of such indispensable obligation, in other cases;) he would however do it in a fair, and honourable, a decent manner: never misrepresent, through design or negligence, the doctrines, the evidence, or the teachers, of the gospel; never study to expose them to the hatred of men by invectives, or to their contempt by ridicule: but inform himself about them with care, judge of them with candour, and speak of them with good breeding and moderation. Widely different from this, is the conduct of our adversaries; who take all methods without scruple to engage on their side, the resentments of some, the avarice of others, the vanity of a third sort, the sensuality of a fourth: and notwithstanding, are able, it seems, to pass themselves upon unwary minds for great lovers of free inquiry: but, with a little attention, *by their fruits ye shall know them.* (Matth. vii. 16.) Would God they were cool and serious enough to know themselves; and to remember, that neither doubt nor disbelief can ever excuse malice or dishonesty. Could they but bring their hearts into such a disposition, their objections would soon diminish, and our answers and arguments appear just and conclusive. To be satisfied of this, let us take a short view of the case of Christianity.

God may certainly inform men of most useful things, which they did not, and could not, else know. He may certainly bestow superior advantages on some ages

and nations from motives of which we are ignorant, yet be sufficiently gracious to all. He may see cause to reveal some things to us very imperfectly, and yet require us to believe what he hath revealed, though we are unable to comprehend what he hath not. He may give us commands, without adding the reasons of them, which yet we are bound to obey: for we ourselves do the same thing. He may appoint various forms of religion, suited to various places and times, full as properly as men appoint various forms of government. Farther still, he might as justly permit us to become what we are, frail and mortal, by means of our first parents transgression, as create us what we are, independently upon it. He is no less merciful in pardoning our sins on account of the willing sacrifice, which he hath provided for us, than if he had pardoned them without any at all. He is no less authorized to demand of us what he will give us power to perform, if we ask it aright; than what we had power to perform of ourselves. And he can as easily form our bodies anew, fitted for the purposes of a better life, as he could form them originally, fitted for the purposes of this. If some parts of his word appear hard to be understood, of small use, or even hurtful; many parts of his works appear so too. If the revelation which he hath given us, hath often done harm instead of good: the reason and the affections which he hath given us, have done so likewise. These few considerations, (and there are many obvious ones besides, of the same kind,) would remove out of every honest mind most of the prejudices raised against the faith of Christians: which indeed, for the greatest part, bear full as hard against the universal providence of God, even against those proceedings of it, which we daily experience.

Then as to the evidence in favour of our religion: whatever difficulties may be started concerning particular points of it, taken singly; as there may, in the same manner, concerning any evidence in the world; yet lay together, in one view, the scripture-narration of things from the beginning; the consistency and connection of the scheme, though carried on for so many thousands of years; the admirable temper and character of the Author of Christianity; the sublimity and reasonableness

sonableness of its doctrines; the purity and benevolence of its precepts; the excellency of its means of improvement and grace; the eternal and true felicity of its rewards; the manifold attestations of its history and miracles; the wonderful propagation of it through the world, and its primitive influence on the souls and lives of men; the undeniable completion of many of its prophecies, and the evident room there is left for the fulfilling of the rest: all these notorious facts, thus united and combined, can surely never fail to convince every impartial examiner, that the system they support must be from God, and that the supreme happiness of man is to share in its blessings. Now the weakest degree of such a persuasion, far from being unworthy of regard, because it is no stronger, ought in all justice to produce a most inquisitive attention to further proof; and, in the mean time, a conscientious practice of what already appears credible. For, though any one's belief exceed his doubts but a little; yet, if it doth so at all, what prevails in his mind ought to regulate his conduct: and, acting thus, he will soon experience his faith to increase. Setting himself to keep the commandments, will show him clearly his want of the mercies acknowledged in the creed: and labouring to behave suitably to his present light, will intitle him to that gracious promise of more, given by our blessed Lord: *If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God.* (John, vii. 17.)

The further and particular obligations of those, who have acquired this knowledge, and are established in the gospel-faith, must be the subject of another discourse. But the general direction for such as are weak and less advanced, is undoubtedly that of the Apostle: *Where-to we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us mind the same thing: and, if in any thing ye be otherwise minded, God will reveal even this unto you.* (Phil. iii. 16. 15.)

S E R M O N XV.

The same Subject concluded.

I THESS. v. 21, 22.

Prove all things: hold fast that which is good: abstain from all appearance of evil.

IN discoursing on these words, I have laid before you the duty of carefully considering our obligations, in respect of piety and morals: and acting suitably to our convictions, on those heads. According as our notions of either vary, whether from our different means of knowledge, or different use of them, it must be expected, that our conduct should vary too. And yet I have shown you, that, were it possible for men to disbelieve the authority both of religion and virtue, mere prudence and self-interest would put them under considerable restraints, in relation to each: that whoever only doubts concerning them, admits they may be true; and therefore should take the acknowledged safer side: that any degree of persuasion, in favour of virtue only, much more of natural religion too, should excite a proportionably serious regard to it: and that the lowest apprehension of the truth of Christianity, (which, I hope, I proved to you, though briefly, hath the clearest marks of truth upon it,) greatly strengthens every other tie; and farther binds men to inform themselves fully about it, as soon as possible; and give it respectful treatment in the mean time.

If then even these persons are to behave thus, how are we to behave? The doubter, nay the infidel, is obliged to no small care of his heart and life: what is the believer obliged to? We pride ourselves on being such; pity or detest those who are not: and yet, all the while, Christians who think and act otherwise than Christians ought, may deserve full as ill, perhaps much worse, than they: indeed, may be one chief cause, that they are what they are. Leaving others therefore to the Judge of all; let us at present think of ourselves: consider, what manner of persons our holy profession requires us to be; and whether we so observe its rules, that we may justly hope to attain its end: *escape the wrath to come* (Matth. iii. 7. Luke, iii. 7.), and *partake of the glory*

glory that shall be revealed. (1 Pet. v. 1.)
Now it plainly requires,

1. That we be duly affected by the peculiar doctrines of Christianity. Many that profess it, and are persuaded of its authority, seem to have no notion almost of its value, or of any great regard owing to it. They say, it is designed intirely to make men live good lives; and accordingly, if they do but live what the world calls a good life, the design is answered. As for matters of mere faith, or even of practice beyond this, they conceive there is little need of being concerned about them: and thus they are very good Christians in their own opinions, with scarce any thing to distinguish them from good, or perhaps even from indifferent, Heathens. In this error, the artful enemies of the gospel studiously confirm its inconsiderate friends. For thus, pretending by no means to oppose it, but only to rectify men's notions about it; and making loud complaints, if they are suspected of any thing worse; they can destroy, where they gain credit, the whole effect of what it adds to the religion of nature: and induce the unwary to imagine, there is nothing in it worth contending for, besides those practical, social, and real duties, as they are pleased, by way of distinction, to call them, which our reason and senses prescribe in common to us all; and which therefore we may learn and observe as well, without as with the Bible; where they lie mixed with many other things, useless, if not hurtful; and are either misrepresented by the writers themselves, or very liable to be mistaken by us. But indeed, if the very writers of scripture, with the spirit of God to assist them, misunderstood the doctrines of revelation; he both chose and guided them extremely ill; nor have we any possible means of understanding those doctrines now. And if either they or we understand them at all; our Maker expects from us the belief of many things undiscoverable by reason, as points of great consequence to our eternal well-being; as with good cause he may. The knowledge of our fallen estate shows us our original destination, and our present need of help from above. The incarnation and death of God's eternal Son could not be appointed by him for purposes of small importance: and his word acquaints us, that blessings of the highest importance

depend on what he hath done and suffered for us: on his atonement and mediation, our title to pardon of sin; on the grace of the Holy Ghost whom he sent, our ability of performing acceptable obedience: on both, our resurrection to eternal life; on our belief of these things, our interest in them. If then the gospel be true, its peculiar doctrines are of the utmost moment: and the duties grounded on them, which we owe to God, as the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ; to his Son, as our Redeemer; to his blessed spirit, as our sanctifier; are both as real, and as weighty, as any possibly can be; fully equal in their obligation, and superior in their rank, to the most valuable ones of human society. They therefore who neglect them, lead very wicked, instead of good lives: and they who esteem them lowly, dishonour the Author of them. It is true, reason cannot prove them: but it doth not contradict them. They are taught in scripture only: but they are taught there by the all-wise God: and he cannot have left us at liberty to model his revelations according to our own fancies; admit part, and reject part: but we are to take the whole plan of our salvation, as he hath delivered it: believe it, though implicitly; and respect it, in proportion to the stress laid upon it by him, who must know. This will naturally dispose us,

2. To perform the next obligation incumbent on us, paying a due regard to the peculiar institutions of Christianity. Great numbers appear to have some how persuaded themselves, that several things, which they must acknowledge their Maker hath appointed, as the ordinary means of heavenly grace and spiritual improvement, may notwithstanding, nearly, if not quite, as well, be let alone. Baptism indeed they do practise; but with plain marks of considering it as a mere empty ceremony; not, as our Saviour hath declared it (Mark, xvi. 16. John, iii. 5.), the express and original condition of our claim to all the mercies of the gospel-covenant. Laying on of hands in confirmation, after proper instruction and a personal engagement to live piously and virtuously, though evidently a very affecting and useful rite, and reckoned, in the epistle to the Hebrews, amongst the principles of the doctrine of Christ (Heb. vi. 1, 2.); is yet desired, in proportion, but by

by few. Receiving the holy eucharist, though a duty of all Christians, enjoined by our blessed Redeemer, almost with his dying words, and declared by St. Paul to be *the communion of his body and blood* (1 Cor. x. 16.), that is, a participation of the benefits of his death; is yet, I ~~feel~~, entirely omitted by most, practised by many of the rest very seldom; and by some from very improper motives: and such reasons are pleaded for the neglect, as have either no weight at all, or equal weight against the hope of future happiness. Praying to God is a dictate of natural, as well as revealed religion. And yet were a great part of you here present questioned, how constantly you pray in private, indeed when you prayed last, and whether you are careful to do it with attention and seriousness, or look on it only as a matter of course; what answer must you give? And as for public worship: how many are there, who yet call themselves Christians, that hardly ever attend it? And how do many others think and speak of it? Perhaps as matter of curiosity and amusement. If they can hope for an entertaining discourse after it, they will condescend to come and do homage to him, that made them, or seem to do it: otherwise they will not. Or perhaps they vouchsafe to attend it as matter of decent example and propriety. Accordingly, in some places they always go to church; in others, never: forgetting, that the latter will be known, and will influence, full as much as the former. Or the least trifle in the world shall determine them, sometimes the one way, sometimes the other. And both doing and omitting it they talk of, in an easy, gay manner, as a thing of no consequence at all. Nay, too often, it is directly pleaded, that they can spend their time as well, or much better, another way: for they know beforehand every thing that is told them here. Now, not to enquire particularly, in what better things, that they could not find leisure for else, those persons actually spend the time of divine service, who tell us so frankly they can: possibly they may, some of them, a little over-rate their knowledge: at least, they frequently seem to have great need of being reminded, if not taught: and had they none, another and higher duty, for which we meet, is prayer. But to this, and all other acts of devotion, they ob-

ject, that true devotion is in the heart; and outward show is nothing material. Why, so is true loyalty, true friendship, every true virtue. But are we therefore bound to give no external demonstration of them? At that rate, what would they be worth, and how long would they last? God indeed doth not want such demonstrations: but we want them, to keep alive our sense of duty to him: the world around us wants them, to spread a like sense amongst others; and, were the benefits of his institutions much less evident than they are; still they are his, and we may be sure he hath reason for them. A good subject will go beyond, rather than come short of, what the laws require, in paying honour to his prince. A penitent criminal will not fail to sue out and plead his pardon in due form, let forms, in themselves, be things ever so insignificant; if he did, purposely or negligently, he would well deserve to forfeit it. Every man of common prudence, on whom, or his family, any thing valuable is bestowed on certain conditions, will think it of consequence to qualify himself or them according to those conditions, whether he sees the particular use of them or not. If then we think such behaviour necessary in all temporal concerns, why not in spiritual? God is our king, and hath prescribed to us the manner of doing him homage. He is our judge, and hath directed us to the method of escaping punishment. He is our gracious benefactor, and hath notified to us the means of obtaining his favours. Why shall any one thing, thus ordered by him, and therefore undoubtedly ordered in wisdom, be either omitted, or observed with contempt? Surely this is by no means the spirit with which sinners ought to receive a tender of forgiveness; and mortals, of eternal life. The epistle to the Hebrews directs the first Christians, even in the midst of persecution, *not to forsake the assembling of themselves together*, which comprehends every public office of religion; and laments, that *the manner of some was* to do otherwise. (Heb. x. 25.) How guilty then must they be, who are now of this number; or put on the appearance of despising the ordinances of Christ, at the same time that they use them; and, though really, to some degree, serious in them, are afraid of being thought so! But this leads me,

3. To a farther obligation we are under, which is to profess our regard, both for the doctrines and the institutions of the gospel, openly and boldly, on all fit occasions. It is a reproach, I believe, peculiar to the Christians of this age and nation, that many of them seem ashamed of their Christianity: would not perhaps be said to have thrown it aside, yet would by no means be imagined much in earnest about it: and therefore study, if possible, to conceal their way of thinking: or, when they are attacked upon it, excuse their piety, as others do their vices, with a sort of laughing half defence; and shift off the subject, as well and as soon as they can. A most astonishing treatment of what our eternal happiness depends on: especially when our Saviour expressly requires us to *confess him before men*, as ever we expect, that he should *confess us before his Father, which is in heaven*. (Matth. x. 32.) It is not meant that we should be affectedly forward in talking of our religion; but, whenever we are called to do so, unaffectedly own it, and stand by it. In such a case, dissimulation, or even reserve, is a mean-spirited desertion of the worthiest cause in the world: and the words of the holy Jesus on another occasion are justly applicable to this, that *he, who is not for him, is against him*. (Matth. xii. 30. Luke, xi. 23.) Whoever is unwilling to be taken for a pious and good man, runs a great risque of soon becoming a profane and bad one. Open profession would have restrained him from doing wrong, and others from tempting him: whereas a timorous concealment exposes him both ways. At least, it gives the irreligious a pretence for saying and imagining, either that every one thinks as they do, or that no one can defend thinking otherwise: and deprives those, who are better disposed, of a very animating and needful support. For no inticement to neglect our duty is so dangerous, as the appearance of general neglect: nor any persecution so effectual, as that of public scorn. Therefore we should combine to shelter one another from it: declare frankly and with spirit, in our private conversation, as well as by our attendance here, what side we are of; not be afraid of a little, perhaps only seeming, contempt from those, who are the justest objects of pity themselves; but be willing to *suffer the affliction of shame*,

amongst others, if it must be so, *with the people of God*: (Heb. xi. 25.) the number of whom is not yet become so small, or so destitute of able advocates, but that, would they unite for that end, they might abundantly keep each other in countenance, and their adversaries in awe. We have every possible reason to be zealous in our cause. Unbelievers have no single good one to be so in theirs. Yet they are active, and we are remiss: and what will this end in, unless we change our conduct? But then if we do, there is a

4th, Most important obligation incumbent on us, that of tempering our zeal with mildness and charity. We ought indeed to *contend earnestly for the faith*, (Jude, 3.) whenever it is opposed: but in a manner worthy of it. Cruel actions, opprobrious words, inward ill-will, unjust bad opinion, are absolutely forbidden us, even towards the enemies of the gospel: and upon the whole, we do treat them with a moderation, which they are far from imitating. But still more gentle should we be to such, as believe Christianity, but only misunderstand it: especially considering, that we are just as liable to mistake, as they. And it is a melancholy consideration, that whilst one part of those, who profess our religion, are so cool about its general and essential interests; most of the other are so immoderately warm about their own particular systems and persuasions. Not only the maintainers of established opinions are apt to judge hardly of the rigid opposers of them, and they to return it: but many, of greater latitude, cry out for liberty to themselves, though they enjoy it to the full, with a spirit of persecution: and whilst they claim an unbounded allowance for every new notion, will give none to those who retain the old; but throw imputations or contempt upon them, without equity or mercy. What can be the consequence of this, but what we experience: that the bitter things which we say of one another, unbelievers, with seemingly good reason, will say after us: and when we have taught them to condemn the several sorts of Christians, and especially their teachers, as the worst of men, will, by a very plausible inference, condemn Christianity, as the worst of religions? How zealously soever therefore contending parties may *hold fast* what

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they

they profess: yet, violating the most indisputable duties by their vehemence for disputable doctrines, they provoke great numbers to sit loose to all profession; and do incredible harm to the religion which they would serve. For, let us try what methods we will, nothing can ever so effectually promote true faith, as joining to practise true charity. But however unanimous Christians may be in other respects, they will neither do honour to the gospel, nor receive benefit from it, unless they are also careful,

5. To be seriously and uniformly pious and virtuous. Yet, most unhappily, whatever else we differ in, we agree but too well in neglecting this. Multitudes call themselves Christians, who seem never to have thought of any care of their conduct; but make a solemn profession of the purest and holiest religion, that ever was; and at the same time, throughout their lives, do every thing that they are inclined to, and nothing else. Others that will observe some restraints, would find, upon a fair examination, that they follow their passions, perhaps in as many or more cases than their principles: or, which comes to the same thing, accommodate their principles to suit their passions. And even they, who have little of any bad inclination to lead them wrong, are very frequently led almost as wrong by indolent compliance with bad custom. For from whence is it, that the generality of men form their rule of behaviour? Not from scripture, or from reason, but from fashion and common practice: whatever they find people of tolerable reputation do, that they do likewise. When a farther step of wrong indulgence is publicly taken, they proceed to take the same; or, it may be, one somewhat less: the duties, which others throw off entirely, they practise rarely, and with indifference: the liberties, which others indulge without reserve, they approach towards with hesitation and by degrees: but as the world goes on from bad to worse, they go on too; and imagine they are perfectly safe, because they are a little behind. Now men should not indeed be superstitiously scrupulous: but they should be conscientiously attentive to their hearts and lives; and reflect what ought to be done, as well as observe what is done. The gospel forbids, instead of recommending, *conformity to the*

world: (Rom. xii. 2.) by no means with an intention, that we should be singular in matters of indifference, but resolute against compliances unlawful or dangerous. Christians, far from being permitted to follow others into sin, are designed to lead them into piety and virtue: to be *the light, the salt of the earth*: (Matth. v. 13, 14.) not to set an example of useless rigour, much less of uncharitable censoriousness; but of punctual and impartial adherence to every rule, which God hath appointed by reason or scripture, and faithful endeavours to attain the great end of his appointments: for without that, the exactest outward regularity is empty form. *Now the end of the commandment is charity, out of a pure heart and of a good conscience, and of faith unfeigned*: (1 Tim. i. 5.) a sincere spirit of love and reverence towards our Maker, our Redeemer and Sanctifier; of justice and goodness to our fellow-creatures, of reasonableness and moderation, with respect to the advantages and enjoyments of the present life; for in these things consists our fitness for a better. This then is the real temper of Christianity. And if we have either never felt it, or perceive ourselves declining and deviating from it; our hearts growing fond of worldly objects, and sinking down into that supine disregard to God and our duty, and a judgment to come, which is undeniably the prevailing, and likely to be the fatal, distemper of the present age: our case and our remedy are plainly laid down in that awful exhortation to the church of Sardis: *I know thy works: that thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead. Be watchful; and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die.—Remember, how thou hast received and heard; and hold fast, and repent. If thou shalt not watch, I will come on thee as a thief; and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee.* (Rev. iii. 1, 2, 3.) But then to do this effectually, we must obey the whole injunction of the text: and not only *hold fast that which is evidently good*, but,

6. And lastly, *abstain from all appearance of evil*. It might be translated, from every kind of evil. But even then, the sense would be much the same. For though doing what we know to be wrong is a grosser kind of wickedness: yet doing what appears to us wrong, though

we are not sure of it, is a real kind : and, even were we absolutely doubtful, still, if taking one course may be acting amiss, and taking the contrary cannot, the general rule certainly is, to lean always towards the securer side : for why should we run into danger needlessly ? And yet what numbers of miserable creatures are there, whom the observance of this one direction would have made happy : who saw the safe path, but would prefer the pleasing one ; exulted in it for a while, then were ensnared of a sudden, and lost perhaps for ever ! Nor is it pleasure only, but interest, power, vanity, resentment, every thing within us and around us, in its turn, that may endanger our innocence, by tempting us to venture upon what we hope, but are not satisfied, is lawful. *Go not therefore in a way, wherein thou mayest fall : be not confident in a plain way.* (Ecclus. xxxii. 20, 21.)

Even such actions, as appear to us very allowable, yet, if they appear evil to others, it is, ordinarily speaking, both our prudence and our duty to abstain from, as much as, with tolerable convenience, we can. Whatever indeed, on mature consideration, we are fully persuaded we ought to do, that we must do, let the world think as it will. But where we apprehend a thing to be only permitted : if the wise will disapprove it, or the injudicious misinterpret it ; if the good will be afflicted, or the bad rejoice at it ; if rigid and warm tempers will be guilty of censuring us for it rashly ; or easy and complying ones follow us in it, against their judgments ; if our taking harmless liberties will encourage others to take sinful ones : in short, if any how, by doing what otherwise we might, we shall induce any one else to do what he ought not : the great law of Christian charity requires, *that no man put a stumbling block, or occasion to fall, in his brother's way ; or do any thing, whereby he is grieved, or offended, or made weak.* (Rom. xiv. 13. 15. 21.) Showing this tender care neither to intice nor provoke a single person, if it can be avoided, into sin of whatever sort, but to *please our neighbour for his good, to edification,* (Rom. xv. 2.) is a precept, I believe, peculiar to the gospel : or at least hath so peculiar a stress laid on it there, as to distinguish our religion, greatly to its honour, from every

other institution of life, that the world hath known.

After such an addition to all the rest, there cannot be a completer provision imagined, by rules of behaviour, for the virtue, the peace, the eternal felicity of mankind. And therefore nothing remains, but what must depend on ourselves ; that, having the best and fullest directions, the noblest promises, the most gracious helps, we think seriously, while it is time, what use we ought to make, and what we do make, of these advantages. The word of God will show us the first : our own consciences, if honestly consulted, will tell us the latter. Happy are they in the highest degree, who can stand the comparison of the two : and happy they, in the next place, whom a deep sense, that at present they cannot, excites effectually to earnest supplications, and faithful endeavours, that they soon may. I conclude therefore with the words following my text. *The very God of peace sanctify you wholly : and I pray God your whole spirit, and soul and body, be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.* (1 Thess. v. 23.)

S E R M O N XVI.

By WILLIAM STEPHENS, M. A.

Nothing in Christianity that may not fairly be accounted for by Reason.

I PET. iii. 15.

Be ready always to give an answer to every man, that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you.

REASON being the distinguishing perfection of human nature, and implanted in us as a guide to happiness, it is to be presumed, that men always act by the dictates of it, even in the common affairs of life ; and much more so, in the affairs of religion ; [or, in regard to the truths they believe, and the worship which they practise towards the Supreme Being.]

A command therefore, like this in the text, [That we should be ready to give an account of the grounds and reasons of our faith,] might seem superfluous to rational beings, who are sup-

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posed

posed to have received it through a rational conviction. Yet, some very probable grounds may be assigned, why such a command from St. Peter was proper, and even necessary, at the first planting of Christianity, and carefully to be attended to by every convert to the faith.

For, in the first place, the Christians of that age were involved in such unhappy circumstances, that their principles exposed them to continual persecution: and they were often, by the malice of their enemies, suddenly, and without warning, hurried before the tribunals of magistrates, and there impleaded as criminals and malefactors. On such occasions it was necessary, that they should be able to account for their faith; otherwise, they must expose to contempt, both themselves and their religion.

In the second place, it is probable, that the apostle, in this command, had an eye to the refuting an usual cavil and objection, which was, from the earliest ages, and very beginning of Christianity, made to the propagators and preachers of it; and that was, that they chose to teach it only to the vulgar and illiterate; that their converts were, generally, persons most easy to be imposed on, women, and children, and men of no education; that they taught it in corners and obscure places, as what could not bear the light, and a thorough examination; and that their principles were so grossly absurd, that they declined the laying them before men of sense and knowledge.

It is likely, that the meanness of circumstances, and narrowness of fortune of the first planters of our religion, might, in some measure, contribute to the raising this plausible objection. But, as to that part of it, which reflected on the religion itself, [that it would not bear the test of a rational examination, and that therefore, they declined the laying it before men of sense and knowledge,] this falsehood they took particular care to obviate, by expressly injoining every convert to the faith, *to be ready always to give an answer to every man, who should ask them a reason of the hope that was in them*; that being thus, at all times, prepared to explain the principles and motives on which they

believed, they might be thereby enabled, both to apologize for themselves before the heathen magistrates, and to vindicate their religion, as well against the arguments, as the reproaches of their adversaries.

This, therefore, is the import of the duty enjoined in the text, that we should be always ready to give a rational account of our faith and religion. Of this I shall not here discourse at large; but the immediate reason of my chusing these words for the subject of our meditations, is, for the sake of a proposition which is evidently implied in them, and upon the supposition of which, the words themselves are evidently founded: and the proposition is this; that there is nothing in our faith and religion, of which a rational account may not be given; and that there is, therefore, nothing in the whole system of Christianity, that is either really contrary to our reason, or, the belief of which may not fairly be accounted for by our reason.

Did our religion injoin us the belief of any doctrine contradictory to human reason, it would be absurd in this apostle, to command us to be ready to give an account, of what would then be wholly unaccountable; or to order us, to vindicate our principles by appeals made to men's natural faculties, if there be any thing in our principles repugnant to men's faculties. It is, therefore, plainly implied by the text, and most evidently follows from it, that there is no article in our religion strictly contradictory to human reason; or, which bears a repugnancy to the natural notions of our minds.

The same conclusion may as strongly be drawn from the nature of God. For, it was one and the same all-wise and all-gracious being, that bestowed on us, both our faculty of reason, and this divine revelation. There cannot, therefore, be any real and express contradiction between them. God cannot command by one rule, what he hath contradicted by another. This would argue an imperfection and weakness in the divine nature; and would be such a dealing with men, as would be inconsistent with the veracity, the goodness, and the justice of God. For these reasons it is apparent, that, notwithstanding some

some doctrines of revelation may seem difficult to our reason, there is, yet, no real contradiction between them.

But, because some of the mysterious truths of divine revelation, (and particularly that of the Blessed Trinity,) have been looked on by many men, to be not only above reason, (for that, I shall hereafter shew, is no valid objection against the receiving it,) but also repugnant and contradictory to it; this hath unhappily given them occasion, to represent reason and faith as opposite to each other; to think, they are not, in all respects, consistent; but that, in some points, one of them must be subverted, and give way to the other.

This mistaken persuasion, as it is one of the greatest indignities and affronts that can be offered to God or religion, so the adhering to it hath been one of the greatest misfortunes that ever befel the church of Christ. For, as reason and revelation have each found their patrons to espouse their cause against each other, and, as men have been divided in their opinions, which it is the more safe to walk by; so, it hath come to pass, that while each of these sorts of men have acted according to their own sentiments, reason hath been given up by one side, and revelation by the other, upon a false supposition, that both of them cannot be maintained together.

One sort, whilst they would raise a seeming merit from their faith, have been afraid to examine their tenets by reason, and have thereby been deluded into superstition and enthusiasm: the other, whilst they endeavour to bring all things to the single test of human reason, and profess to believe nothing, but what they can fully comprehend, have thereby been betrayed into scepticism, or bold infidelity. The one sort attribute too little to reason, the other sort too much.

Those who deny the Trinity reject that doctrine, because there are difficulties in it, and they cannot fully comprehend it. The church of Rome, through an implicit faith, and an absolute resignation of reason, hath admitted many gross absurdities as matters of faith. Both sides have herein acted upon mistaken principles. Matters of revelation cannot, for the causes before assigned,

be contradictory to reason; nor, on the other hand, is it at all reasonable to receive and believe nothing, but what we can fully comprehend and account for.

The middle way is to be observed between these two extremes. Reason must be our guide in our enquiries, whether the revelation be itself true; and whether the doctrine be contained in that revelation. But, when we are satisfied of these two points, [that the revelation is divine, and that the doctrine is contained in it,] reason hath then done its utmost; and we cannot reject a doctrine, which appears to be divinely revealed, merely because we cannot fully comprehend it by our reason.

For the settling, therefore, and confirming our faith, especially in the more abstruse and difficult parts of it, it may be of great use to us to examine, how far we are to take reason for our guide; and how far not; to settle the distinct provinces of reason and revelation, and to assign to each of them its proper limits. In order to this, I shall prove,

First, (against those, who profess to believe nothing, but what their reason can fully comprehend,) that human reason, or human comprehension is not the ultimate rule in all points of faith; but that we must, and do believe many tenets, which are incomprehensible by human faculties.

Secondly, I shall evince, (against those who attribute too little to reason, and reject the use of it in matters of revelation,) that reason is highly serviceable to the interests of revelation, and the great supporter of it.

Lastly, I shall apply, in a practical manner, what shall have been suggested and delivered on each of these heads.

In the first place then, (against those who profess to believe nothing in religion, but what their reason can fully comprehend,) I shall undertake to prove, that human reason, or human comprehension, is not the ultimate rule in all points of faith; but that we must, and do believe many tenets, which are incomprehensible by human faculties.

When I assert, that human reason is not the ultimate rule in all points of faith, I do not understand or mean, that we are obliged to believe any thing farther than we have reason so to do; or,

that, without grounds of reason, we are to admit any proposition; for, in truth, our faith in the revelation itself is grounded upon reason. We should not admit the Scripture, did we not see reason to do so; and faith itself being a rational assent, wherever reason ends, faith must of necessity end with it; but, what I hereby understand, is, that there may be some points in a divine revelation, incomprehensible by reason, which are not, therefore, to be disbelieved, when we have a rational conviction of the revelation in the gross.

To instance in the mystery of the Trinity. The manner how Three distinct persons subsist in One undivided Godhead, is not to be comprehended by human reason: yet, I say, this alone is no good reason for a disbelief of that truth, to one who is rationally convinced, that this doctrine is contained in scripture, and that the scripture, which contains it, is the word of God. By this instance you will perceive, that it is unreasonable to set up our own comprehensions, as the ultimate rule in points of faith; since we may have all imaginable reason to believe a truth, which yet we cannot comprehend by the utmost stretch of our faculties. For,

First, if we consider how weak human reason is, how short its views, and how narrow its sphere, the insufficiency and incompetency of it will appear manifestly. Indeed, in all things that are before us, *we see as through a glass darkly*; and scarce any thing is certain, but merely outside. Of this we ourselves are very sensible. And, for this reason also we may presume it was, that God himself hath, in holy scripture, spoken so fully and frequently of the shortness of our reason, as it were with a design to caution us, and make us wary, how we lay too much stress thereon, or be led too far out of the way by its guidance.

Thus, (Eph. iv. 18.) the apostle says, *the understanding is darkened, being alienated from the life of God, through the ignorance which is in men, because of the blindness of their heart*. So again, (Rom. viii. 7.) we are told, that *the carnal mind is enmity against God; that it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be*. Again, (1 Cor. ii. 14.) the apostle tells us, that *the natural man receiveth not the*

things of the spirit of God; for they are foolishness unto him; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned. And, in pursuance of this representation of the incompetency of our natural faculties, the natural state of man is ever described in the New Testament, as a state of darkness, and deprivation of spiritual knowledge. It can be no valid objection, therefore, to the truth of a doctrine, that our reason cannot comprehend it, since it must be allowed, that our reason itself is but imperfect, and its compass narrow.

Secondly, Human comprehension cannot be the ultimate rule in all points of belief, because we must and do believe many truths, even in natural things, which yet are incomprehensible by human faculties. We know, for instance, that the several parts of matter cohere, and are united to each other; but after what manner they thus cohere, no philosophy hath yet been able to solve. We know not the essences, nor the ways of acting, of the most obvious things in nature; and much less do we know of the deep things of God. We cannot comprehend the nature of a spiritual substance; yet, we must allow that we have such a one within us. We cannot reach the method, how immaterial beings can act upon or influence the material; yet, we cannot deny that our souls act upon these our bodies. We cannot disbelieve that our souls are united to our bodies; but, in what manner this union is made, is entirely unknown to us. We are absolutely strangers to the methods in which our own senses act; yet, I hope, no man will therefore deny, that we have any senses at all. We cannot explain the manner of vision; but, shall we therefore disbelieve the truth of sight? Shall we deny that there are any objects of our senses, because we cannot conceive how our inward ideas represent them to us.

In some propositions, both sides of the question seem to be very clear, almost to demonstration; and a man may easily confute himself, or, at least, seem to do so, on the affirmative, or the negative. Thus, in that celebrated question of the schools, relating to the Infinite Divisibility of Matter, we must allow, that let a particle of matter be divided as far as our imagination can suggest, yet, it will still

still be matter, and therefore capable of yet farther division. This is undeniable. And yet, on the other hand, it is altogether incredible, that the smallest quantity of matter should have as many parts as the greatest; and that, in that respect, a part should be equal to the whole. The several appearances of the heavenly bodies; their almost immense distance from us; and yet the suddenness and quickness with which they transmit their light to us, are matters as incomprehensible by our reason, as any point of our faith can be; and yet are certain, even to demonstration. The flux and reflux of the sea; the origin and propagation of winds; the power and efficacy of the load-stone; are things whose reality we daily experience; and yet, in the accounting for them, the greatest part of mankind must confess their ignorance. The production of animals; the conception and formation in the womb; the manner in which they receive life, and the soul that animates them, is infused into them, are matters entirely above our comprehension; but yet, the truth of which is disputed by no man. Why the organs of man's body must be disposed in such a particular manner for the soul to operate, and exert herself in it; and why, upon an indisposition of any of these organs, she ceases to operate, and the animal life expires, is what no one, in his senses, will pretend to account for, and yet no one, in his senses, will pretend to deny. Why the composition and structure of an human body only, makes it a fit and proper seat for a rational soul; and why the bodies of brutes are not as capable of receiving it as ours, is as unaccountable to our reason, as it is evident to our experience.

In a word, the whole face of nature is an obscure mystery to us. Wherever we turn our reflections, we meet with difficulties we cannot solve; but which, however, cannot hinder our belief of the things themselves. Human reason, therefore, cannot be deemed the ultimate rule or judge in matters of faith; and it can be no objection to any truth, that we do not fully comprehend it, because in these, and many more instances which might be produced, we find ourselves necessitated to believe many things, which

the reason of man can in no wise comprehend.

Thirdly, The incomprehensibility of any doctrine by our reason, can be no valid excuse for our disbelieving and rejecting it, because God, doubtless, may, and in fact doth require from us the belief of other propositions, which are as much above our reason, as these doctrines are alleged to be. I say, above our reason; because, as I have shewn already, God cannot require us to believe a thing contrary to reason; for that were inconsistent with his veracity. But, I can see no cause, why he may not justly require of us the belief of some truths which are above our reason, as trials of our faith, and evidences of our submission to him.

The faculty of reason we enjoy by his gift. Our perfections are all of his conferring; and where nothing is required repugnant to these, it can be no hard dealing, on the part of God, to demand a faith from us. It cannot be thought inconsistent with his wisdom, or other infinite perfections, to impart to men some certain truths, without letting them into the exact knowledge of the ways and manners in which to account for them. Nor can it be any reflection on the goodness of God, to admit us into some knowledge, without letting us into all.

Shall we deny what we do really understand upon a certain subject, because we understand no more, or not all of it? God may, doubtless, reveal to us what truths he pleases: and such as he does reveal, we are concerned to receive, though the things themselves are above the compass of our reason.

And, as God *may* do this, so in fact it is evident he *hath* done it; there being many truths relating to the nature and existence of God, which our reason itself can demonstrate to be true, and which, therefore, are universally received; but yet, the manner of which is altogether as unaccountable to our reason, as any of the mysteries of the Christian faith.

The eternity, and other attributes of the godhead are of this kind. It is demonstrable that something must be eternal; because, otherwise it were impossible, that any thing could have been brought into being at all. Yet, who-

ever will undertake to solve all the difficulties that may be started about eternity, will find himself under a task unfathomable. That a being, which hath existed from all eternity, is even now as new as ever it was, and after infinite ages to come, will be no older than now it is; existence without duration; and continuance in being, without succession of time, are things vastly superior to our reason; and which yet, by the same faculty of reason we are capable of demonstrating.

Omnipresence, without extension; and a certain fore-knowledge of future contingencies, without laying free agents under a necessity of action, are difficulties which exceed our comprehensions, and which yet our very reason obliges us to believe.

The perfections of the divine nature we know to be infinite; and therefore must believe them such: but to endeavour to comprehend them by our finite capacities, is, at first view, ridiculous.

In a word, the chief use of reason in enquiries about faith, is, to examine, in the first place, whether the revelation carries the marks of divine authority; and, in the next place, whether the proposition advanced, be contained in that revelation. When we are satisfied of these two, reason hath nothing farther to do. We are then obliged to believe, though we cannot comprehend; since we have assurance, that the doctrine is revealed by God, who can neither deceive, nor be deceived.

Hitherto I have maintained my first proposition, against those who have attributed too much to our reason; and have shewn, that reason is not the ultimate judge of all doctrines; that all truths are not to be measured by our narrow comprehensions; that the incomprehensibility of a doctrine, is no valid objection against our admitting and embracing it; and that for these reasons; because our comprehensions are confessedly narrow; we receive truths in natural knowledge, which no man can solve; and we admit the natural notions of God, and of his attributes, which are evidently as inexplicable as any doctrines of revealed religion.

I go on now to my second general head, in which I am to evince, (against

those who attribute too little to reason,) that reason is highly serviceable to the interests of religion, and, in truth, the great supporter of it.

Too fond an opinion of the merit of faith, and a mistaken supposal that some of the mysteries of our religion are inconsistent with, and repugnant to, reason, hath induced some Christians, (particularly those of the church of Rome,) to discard the use of reason in all matters of faith; to assert, that it hath nothing to do in religion; and that it is not to be heard in any disquisitions on that subject.

But, this assertion is surely the highest indignity that can be put on our faith: for, it supposes that we admit some things for truths, which are contradictory to our reason, which no one is capable of doing who thinks and reasons at all. But, this is not the only ill consequence, which that church hath been led into by a blind resignation of reason. It is this unhappy persuasion, that hath introduced among them several absurdities, (of which Transubstantiation may be called the chief,) which they obstinately retain as articles of faith; though they bear a plain repugnancy, both to right reason, and to our outward senses.

I have already, under the former head of this discourse, in some measure, done justice to this noble faculty of reason, by asserting, that all religion is ultimately founded on reason; that we embrace the Christian revelation itself upon the grounds of reason; that we admit nothing, as of faith, farther than we have reason so to do; nay, that it is not without reason, that we embrace even the mysteries of our religion, (the Trinity, the Incarnation, the Doctrine of God's Decrees, and the like,) which, though they cannot be comprehended, or fully explained by reason, are yet embraced by us, as parts of that revelation, whose divine authority is confirmed by arguments from reason. We admit the suffrage of reason in all things, where reason can be a competent judge, and be rightly informed: and we disown it no farther, than where itself falls short, and is, from the very nature of things, incapable of judging. In every other part of religion, we admit her determination; we even appeal to her; and by her test, rightly

rightly understood, and within proper bounds, we are content either to stand or fall. For the necessity, therefore, of using reason in matters of religion, I shall produce the following arguments :

First, Reason, as I said, is necessary, not only for our satisfaction, that the Christian revelation itself is derived from God ; but also, to our finding out and discovering the several particular doctrines contained therein. It is solely by the use of our reason on the scriptures, that we arrive at the knowledge of what they contain. It is by comparing one passage of scripture with another ; by illustrating text by text ; by judging from thence of their import and sense ; and by drawing consequences from them, (all which actions are the proper business and exercise of reason,) that we find the several truths which we are obliged to believe. The whole complex of our religion, and the several doctrines it proposes to us, are not set down in holy scripture in so many express words, or summed up in a number of particular propositions ; but we attain the knowledge of some of them, by reasoning from several scattered passages ; by drawing nice deductions and consequences ; and by inferring some truths from others more explicitly declared.

This use of our rational faculties is what no sober man can oppose. Nay, the greatest adversaries of reason in religion do thus far, at least, make use of their reason. Nay, in some parts of religion, we justly call in the assistance of philosophy itself, and confute gainfayers from natural knowledge. Thus, we refer an Atheist for his conviction, to the creation of the world, to the works of God's hands ; and from the greatness, the power, the wisdom therein manifested, we rationally infer the existence of a God. Those who deny a Providence, we refer to the regularity, and wise management, which appear to our observation in the dispensation of nature. The modern Sadducees, those who deny spiritual substances, we refute, by evincing from principles of philosophy, that mere matter and motion cannot account for thought and reflection. The same use of right reason enables us to overturn superstition and enthusiasm ; into both which men are easily betrayed, when they have parted with the guid-

ance of reason. In so many respects is reason of service to religion, both as to the discovering truth, and the preserving us in the confession of it.

Secondly, For the free use of reason in religion, we have the command of God himself, the practice of our Saviour, and the injunction of his apostles. In the first chapter of Isaiah, verse the eighteenth, God calls the rebellious Israelites to reason with him. *Come now, saith he, and let us reason together.* He appeals to their own understandings for the vanity of idols ; and leaves it to their judgments to determine concerning the equality of his ways, and their iniquity of their own.

In the New Testament, our Saviour, in his conferences with the Jews upon the subject of his being the Messiah, always refers his hearers to the writings of the prophets, and their private judgements and reasonings upon them. He builds nothing, in that respect, upon his own single authority, but sends them to Moses and the prophets for satisfaction that he was the Christ. Here was a plain appeal to their reason, in the most momentous affair belonging to religion : and accordingly as they should find these scriptures to testify of him, they were to form their judgments concerning his pretensions. In his pressing his disciples to the performance of moral duties, he uses arguments drawn merely from the nature of things. He argues against anxiety about worldly necessities from the consideration, that *God feedeth the ravens, that he clotheth the grass of the field* ; and from thence infers, that he will take care of man, so much better than they are. He instructs them, (Matt. vii. 11.) that *our heavenly Father will give good things to those that ask him, because earthly parents know how to give good gifts to their children* ; the ground of which consequence is only this principle of reason, that God is more gracious and tender to us, than our natural parents are.

The apostle St. Paul commends it in the Beræans, that *they searched the Scriptures*, and examined by their reason and judgment, *whether things were so as the apostles preached them.* In another place, he bids us *examine ourselves, whether we be in the faith.* He tells the Corinthians, that *he spake as unto wise men,*

men, and he bids them *judge what he said*. And St. John commands us, to *try the spirits, whether they be of God*. All these passages of Scripture are founded upon that liberty we are presumed to have, in examining faith by our reason, in all proper cases; and consequently, we are not debarred of the use of reason in matters of religion.

Lastly, Reason is of the utmost service to us in our religion, by helping us in the interpreting scripture; by directing us, how to apply the general rules of morality, there laid down, to private cases, and the particular circumstances of ourselves; by shewing how to reduce into practice what is there delivered in theory; by enabling us to draw proper and useful inferences from the several facts there related: by instructing us to apply to ourselves the examples there recorded of others; and, by these means, making scripture serviceable to, what was its only end, the salvation of our souls.

To sum up the whole in a few words: The use of reason in revealed religion is briefly this; We are to examine by its guidance, whether the revelation be of God's making, and of divine original; and then, whether the several doctrines alleged to be contained in it, are really deducible from it or no. All this is to be tried by reason; and this is its proper province. But, when the mind and judgment of man is convinced of these two points, it is thenceforward no valid objection to any thing therein contained, that it is above the compass of our reason,—that we cannot fully explain it, or that it is incomprehensible by us; because, we are already satisfied, that God hath revealed it; that it is therefore true; that its incomprehensibility ought not to weigh with us, because we admit and believe many other truths, both in natural philosophy, and natural religion, which are altogether as much above our reason, and as inexplicable by it, as any doctrine contained in scripture. These are the occasions, on which we are to follow the repeated directions of St. Paul, to *bring our reason into captivity*, and to submit and subject it to divine revelation.

I proceed now, in the last place, briefly to apply, in a doctrinal and a practical manner, what hath been suggested and delivered in this whole discourse.

You have been shewn the distinct limits between faith and reason; and have been informed of the ill consequences of ascribing, either too much, or too little, to either of them in matters of religion. Let us, therefore, be careful to keep the middle way between these two extremes. Let us not, with the Romanists, discard reason, and give it no place in matters of faith, lest, with them, we are betrayed into superstition and enthusiasm: nor, on the other hand, let us, with Sceptics or Infidels, advance reason so much above her due place, as to receive nothing but what she can fully comprehend, lest we endanger our faith in God's revelation, and reject the doctrines he hath plainly taught us. Let us be always ready, as we are directed in the text, to give an answer to every man, that asketh us a reason of the hope that is in us: but, let these reasons be such, as shall, on the one hand, be no disparagement to our human faculties, nor, on the other, any dishonour to the word of God.

To this end, let it be our endeavour to inform, and acquaint ourselves with those solid foundations, upon which our religion is built. Upon this search, we shall find it a religion, reasonable in itself, perfective of human nature, and worthy the wisdom and goodness of God its author. When we are thus satisfied, *Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering*: and withal, let us honour it with the exercise of such moral duties, as ennoble and adorn it. Let us follow St. Peter's directions, (with which I shall conclude,) in adding to our faith virtue, and to virtue knowledge, and to knowledge temperance, and to temperance patience, and to patience godliness, and to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness charity. For, if these things be in us, and abound, they will make us, that we shall be neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

S E R M O N XVII.

By ARCHBISHOP TILLOTSON.

Of a Trinity in Unity.

I TIM. ii. 5.

For there is one God.

THERE are several propositions contained in this and the following verse; but I shall at present confine myself to the first, namely, *that there is one God, and but one; there is none other God but one.* Moses makes the unity of the divine nature, to be the foundation of the natural law, as well as of the Jewish religion; *the Lord he is one God, and there is none besides him.* This the prophet Isaiah also perpetually declares in opposition to polytheism, and that variety of gods which prevailed among the Heathens. *I am the first, and I am the last, and besides me there is no God. Is there any God besides me? There is no God, I know not any.* He whose knowledge is infinite, knows no other God; and our blessed Saviour makes this the fundamental article of all religion, and the knowledge thereof necessary to every man's salvation; *this is life eternal, to know thee the only true God.*

The unity of the divine nature is a notion wherein the greatest and wisest part of mankind did always agree; and may therefore reasonably be presumed to be either natural, or to have sprung from some original tradition delivered down from the first parents of mankind; I mean, that there is one supreme Being, the author and cause of all things, whom the ancient Heathen poets called the father of gods and men. Aristotle thus defines God; "the eternal and most excellent, or best of all living beings." And this notion of one supreme Being perfectly agrees with that exact harmony, which appears in the frame and government of the world, wherein we see all things conspiring to one end, and continuing in one uniform order and course; and this in reason can only be ascribed to one constant and uniform cause, and which, to a considering man, plainly proves, that all things are made and go-

verned by that one powerful principle, that great and wise mind, which we call God. But though the generality of mankind had a notion of one supreme God, yet the idolatry of the Heathen evidently shews, that afterwards this notion was greatly corrupted, and degenerated into an apprehension of a plurality of Gods. However, reason assures us there can be no more than one God, and who being of infinite perfection, is as sufficient as ten thousand deities, could so many exist. But notwithstanding the multitude of deities, which the fond superstition of men had formed to themselves, yet the wiser Heathens, such as Socrates, Plato, Tully, and others, preserved a true notion of "one supreme God, whom they defined to be an infinite spirit, pure from all matter, and free from all imperfection." Tertullian observes, that even when idolatry had much obscured the glory of the sovereign deity, yet the greater part of mankind, in their common forms of speech, did still appropriate the name of God in a more peculiar manner to one; "saying, if God grant, if God please," and the like. So that there is sufficient reason to believe, that the unity of the divine nature, or the notion of one supreme God, creator and governor of the world, was the primitive and general sentiment of mankind; and that polytheism and idolatry were a corruption and degeneracy from the original notion which men had concerning God; as the scripture history doth fully declare and testify. But then it should be observed, that whatever may be said of the Heathen idolatry by way of extenuation, in behalf of some few of the wiser and more devout among them, yet the generality were notoriously guilty, both of believing more gods, and of worshipping false gods: and this must needs be a very great crime, since the scripture assures us how jealous God is in this case, and that he will not give his glory to another, nor his praise to graven images. We should not so much as use sensible images to remind us of God, lest devout ignorants, seeing the worship paid by wise men towards an idol, should terminate their worship to the Deity itself, which was certainly the case of great part of the Heathen world; and surely those Christians are in no less danger of idolatry, who pay a veneration to images, by kneeling

kneeling down and praying before them; or rather they are more inexcusable, because they offend against a much clearer light.

I shall now proceed to shew how agreeable this principle, that *there is but one God*, is to the common reason of mankind, to the clearest and most essential notions we have of God. And this will appear, first, by considering the most essential perfections of the divine nature. Secondly, from the inconsistency and impossibility, the great absurdity and inconvenience of supposing more gods than one.

First, by considering the most essential perfections of the divine nature. Absolute perfection, which we ascribe to God, necessarily supposes unity; because it is essential to the notion of an absolute perfect being, that all perfection should meet and be united in such a being: but to imagine more gods, some perfections in one, some in another, destroys the most essential notion men have of God, that he is a being absolutely perfect: for to suppose some perfections in one God, which are not in another, is to suppose God wanting in some possible perfection; which is a contradiction to the most natural notion we have of God, that he is a being in whom all perfections center. But if there are more gods than one, each of whom hath all possible perfections united in him, then all but one would be needless, and consequently this cannot be, since necessary existence is essential to the Deity; and therefore, if only one God is necessary, there can be no more.

Secondly, from the inconsistency and impossibility, the great absurdity and inconvenience of the contrary. For example, suppose there were two gods, (and if two there may be a million,) either these two would be equal and alike in all perfections, or they would not; if equal and alike in all things, then one would be needless; and if one, why not the other? they being supposed to be perfectly alike. And then there would be no necessity for the being of God, and yet all agree that necessary existence is essential to the notion of God. But if they are unequal, one of them inferior to, and less perfect than the other, that which is so could not be God, because he would not have all perfection. So that view it in what light we will, the notion

of more gods than one, is by its own repugnancy destructive of itself.

But before I apply this doctrine of the unity of God, I must endeavour to remove one difficulty, concerning the doctrine of the blessed Trinity, or of three real differences, or distinct persons, in one and the same nature; for though this is not a difficulty peculiar only to the Christian religion, as hath been inconsiderately thought; since long before Christianity appeared, there was an ancient tradition, both among Jews and Heathens, concerning three real differences or distinctions in the divine nature, nearly resembling the doctrine of the Trinity, as I shall presently more fully shew: yet it cannot be denied, but that this difficulty in a more particular manner affects the Christian religion; as those who believe a Trinity do also believe *there is but one God*. But some will say, how can this possibly consist with the doctrine of Christians concerning the Trinity; God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, to each of whom they attribute by authority of scripture, the most incommunicable properties and perfections of the divine nature? And what is this but to affirm that there are three gods? For the clearing of this difficulty, I shall briefly offer these following considerations.

Let it then be well considered, that there is a wide difference between the nice speculations of the schools, beyond what is revealed concerning the doctrine of the Trinity, and what the scripture only teaches and asserts of this mystery. For it cannot be denied but that the schoolmen, who wrought great part of divinity out of their own brain, as spiders do cobwebs out of their own bowels, have started a thousand subtleties about this mystery, such as no Christian need trouble his head with, much less to believe them. The modesty of Christians is contented in divine mysteries, to know what God hath revealed concerning them, without having the curiosity of being wise above what is written. They acknowledge, that the doctrine of the Trinity, even as it is asserted in scripture, is still a great mystery, and so imperfectly revealed, as in a great measure to be incomprehensible by human reason. And therefore I dare not give particular explication of this great mystery by the
strength

strength of reason, knowing the difficulty and danger, and my own insufficiency to attempt it. To shew the credibility of the thing, from the authority of scripture, without descending to a more particular explication than scripture hath given, will surely be enough; lest by endeavouring to clear the difficulties already started, new ones should be raised, harder to be removed. Firmly to believe what God hath thought fit to declare in this matter, is necessary for us, though we do not perfectly comprehend all he hath revealed concerning it. For in such cases an implicit faith is very commendable; I mean to believe whatever we are sufficiently assured God hath revealed, though we do not fully understand the meaning of such revelations. Thus every man who believes the holy scriptures to be a divine revelation, doth also implicitly believe the prophetic books of scripture, and several obscure expressions in those books, though he does not particularly understand the meaning of all the predictions and expressions contained in them. And there are many good Christians that do not believe and comprehend the mysteries of faith nicely enough to approve themselves to a scholastical judge of controversies; who yet, if they heartily embrace the doctrines which are clearly revealed in scripture, and live up to the plain precepts of the Christian religion, will, I doubt not, be very well approved of, by the great, just, and infallible Judge of the world. As to the words Trinity and Person, though the former is not to be found in scripture, nor the latter is there expressly applied to Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, yet these three are there spoken of, with as much distinction from one another, as we can speak of three several persons; and it will be difficult to find a more convenient word, whereby to express the distinction of the three; for which reason I see no just cause to quarrel at these terms, so as we mean thereby no more nor less, than what the scripture says in other words.

It deserves further to be considered, that there has been a very ancient tradition, concerning three real differences or distinctions in the divine nature, nearly resembling the Christian doctrine of the Trinity. The Jews had this notion; who distinguished the word of God, and

the holy spirit of God, from him who was absolutely called God, whom they looked on as the first principle of all things.

And among the Heathen, Plato, who probably had this notion from the Jews, made three distinctions in the Deity, by the names of essential goodness, mind, and spirit. So that whatever objections this matter may be liable to, neither the Jews nor Plato have reason to object it to us Christians; especially since they pretend no other ground for it, than either their own reason, or ancient tradition; whereas we Christians appeal to a divine revelation for what we believe in this matter, and which we believe singly on that account. And it is very remarkable, that the scriptures deliver this doctrine of the Trinity without the least doubt concerning the unity of the divine nature, and constantly assert, that *there is but one God*. In those very texts which mention these three differences, the unity of the divine nature is expressly asserted; as, *there are three that bear record in heaven, the father, the word, and the spirit; and these three are one*. Nor can a plurality of gods be inferred from this mystery, as the same is delivered in scripture, without making the scripture grossly to contradict itself; and if either councils, fathers, or schoolmen, have so explained this mystery as to give any just ground or plausible colour for such an inference, let the blame fall where it is due, and not be charged on the holy scriptures; but rather, let God be true, and every man a liar.

Let it also be considered; that it is not repugnant to reason, to believe some things which are incomprehensible by our reason, provided we have sufficient ground for the belief of them: especially as to what concerns God, whose nature is incomprehensible, when he hath certainly revealed them. We need not wonder that these differences in the Deity are incomprehensible, by our finite understandings, when the divine nature itself is so; and yet the belief of that is the foundation of all religion. There are many things in nature which we cannot comprehend how they are or can be; as the certainty of matter how the parts hang so fast together, that they are often very hard to be parted; or how the small seeds of things contain the whole form and

and nature of the things from whence they proceed, and into which they gradually grow; and yet this is common to our sight and knowledge. There are also many things in ourselves, which we know not how they are done and performed; as the vital union of soul and body. Who can imagine by what means a spirit is so closely united to a material body as not to be parted without great force and violence offered to nature? The same may be said of our several faculties of sense and imagination, of memory and reason, and the liberty of our wills; and yet we certainly find all these in ourselves, though we cannot comprehend or explain the manner in which the several operations of them are performed; much less can we expect to comprehend the infinite nature and perfection of God, who is certainly the greatest mystery of all others, and whose nature and manner of existence are both incomprehensible by human understanding. And the reason of this is evident, because God is infinite, and our knowledge is but finite; and yet no sober man ever thought this a good reason to call the being of God in question. The same may be said of God's certain knowledge of future contingencies, which depend on the uncertain wills of free agents; it being utterly inconceivable, how any understanding can certainly before-hand know that which depends on another's free will; and yet the scripture not only attributes this fore-knowledge to God, but gives us plain instances of God's foretelling such things many ages before it happened, as could not come to pass but by the sins of men, in which God can have no hand, though he permits it. Such was the memorable event of the death of Christ, who was by wicked hands crucified and slain, and which is said to have happened according to the determinate fore-knowledge of God, foretold by him many hundred years before. Both scripture and natural reason ascribe this power and perfection to the divine nature, and yet it would puzzle the greatest philosophy, to determine how any knowledge can infallibly foresee an event, through uncertain contingent causes.

Again, what is more inconceivable than how a thing should be of itself, without any cause of its being? And yet our reason compels us to acknowledge this; because we certainly see that something is,

which either must have been of itself, without a cause; or else something that we do not see, must have been of itself, and also made all other things. It is by this reasoning we are forced to acknowledge a Deity, the mind of man being able to find no rest but in the acknowledgment of one eternal and wise mind, as the first principal cause of all other things; and this principal is what mankind by general consent call God. So that God hath laid a sure foundation to acknowledge his being in the reason of our minds. And though it is extremely difficult to conceive how any thing can be of itself, yet necessity obliges us to acknowledge it; and this once granted, our reason, tried by trying other ways, is forced to join with the general apprehension and belief of mankind concerning a Deity. Thus it appears by several instances, that it is not repugnant to reason, to believe the existence of many things, whereof we cannot give any particular and distinct account; much less is it contrary to reason to believe what we are well assured God hath declared concerning himself, though it should be incomprehensible to our reason. This is the present case: we are sufficiently assured the scriptures are a divine revelation, and that this mystery of the Trinity is therein declared. That we cannot comprehend it, is no sufficient reason not to believe it; for if it was, then no man ought to believe there is a God, his nature being certainly incomprehensible. But many arguments from natural reason assure us, *there is a God*; and that he is incomprehensible; and to believe him so, does not lessen our belief of his being. In like manner, divine revelation teaches us the truth of this doctrine of the Trinity, and if we cannot comprehend it, that is not reason for us to disbelieve it. A man cannot deny what he sees, though it be something which he cannot comprehend. It ought then to satisfy us, that we have sufficient evidence of this doctrine's being delivered in scripture, free from contradiction; without pretending to comprehend what is infinite, or to know all the real differences that are consistent with the unity of an infinite Being, or to be able fully to explain this mystery, by any similitude taken from finite beings.

And here I beg leave to consider an objection made by the church of Rome, namely,

namely, that by the same reason we believe in the doctrine of the Trinity, we ought to receive that of transubstantiation. A doctrine the most abominably absurd, of all that ever was invented. But there is by no means equal reason, to receive or reject these two doctrines, of the Trinity and transubstantiation.

First, there is not equal reason for the belief of these two doctrines, by any evidence and proof from scripture; it being no more evident from thence, that the sacramental bread is substantially changed into Christ's natural body, by virtue of those words, *this is my body*; than that Christ is changed into a vine, or a rock, by virtue of those words which call him a vine or a rock; or, that the Christian church is substantially changed into the natural body of Christ, because it is expressly said of the church, that it is his body. Besides, several of their own writers confess that transubstantiation can neither be directly proved, nor necessarily concluded from scripture; but this the writers of the Christian church did never acknowledge concerning the Trinity and the divinity of Christ, but have always appealed to the clear and undeniable testimonies of scripture for the proof of these doctrines. The force then of the objection amounts to this; that if we must believe the greatest absurdity, though we cannot comprehend it, then we must by the same reason believe the greatest absurdity, though we have no divine revelation concerning it. And if this be their meaning, we cannot grant what they would have, because there is not equal reason to believe two things, for one of which there is good proof, but none for the other.

Secondly, Neither is there equal reason for rejecting these two doctrines; either because they are equally incomprehensible, or equally absurd and contradictory. I have already shewn there is no reason to reject a doctrine because it is incomprehensible; and I hope it will not be said, that we may as well deny the being of a God, because it is incomprehensible by our reason, as deny transubstantiation, because it evidently contradicts our senses. Nor are these two doctrines equally absurd and contradictory; so far from it, that the doctrine of the Trinity, as delivered in the scriptures, and herein before explained, hath no absurdity or contradic-

tion, either involved in, or consequent to it; but the doctrine of transubstantiation is full of both. But suppose there even was some appearance of absurdity and contradiction in the doctrine of the Trinity, as delivered in scripture, must we therefore believe a doctrine that is not there revealed, and which is not only absurd, and contradictory to sense and reason, but what at once destroys all manner of certainty? The priests of Baal did not half so much deserve to be exposed by the prophet for their superstition and folly, as the priests of the church of Rome do, for this senseless, stupid doctrine of theirs, with a hard name.

The practical inferences which I shall make from this doctrine of the unity of the divine nature, shall be the same that God himself made by Moses. *Hear, O Israel, the Lord thy God is one Lord; and thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength; and thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.* So that according to our Saviour, the whole duty of man, namely, the love of God, and of our neighbour, is founded in the unity of the divine nature.

First, the love of God; *the Lord thy God is one Lord, therefore thou shalt love him with all thy heart, &c.* this is the *first and great commandment*; comprehending all the duties of the first table; that is, we should serve him only, and pay no religious worship to any but him; for God being but one, we can rightly give religious worship to none but him: and among all the parts of religious worship, solemn invocation and prayer is peculiarly appropriated to the Deity; because he is ever present to know our desires and wants, and always able to supply them. We may also infer from the unity of the divine nature, that we should not worship God by any image or representation; because he is a singular being, and nothing can be like, or fit to be compared to him: *To whom will ye liken me, saith the Lord, and make me equal?* And therefore with no distinction whatever can it be lawful to give any part of religious worship to any but God; because him only we believe to be God.

Secondly, The love of our neighbour is also founded in the unity of the divine nature, and may be inferred from it. *The Lord thy God is one Lord, therefore*
thou

thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. There is one God and father of all; hath not one God created us? Why do we then deal treacherously every man against his brother? When therefore we see great enmity and hatred amongst men, sad divisions and animosities among Christians, we may not only ask St. Paul's question, is Christ divided? but also, is God divided? Is there not one God, and are not we his offspring? Are not we all the sons of Adam, who was the son of God? so that originally all are equal: and this equality, that we are all God's creatures and image, and that the one only God is the father of us all, is a more real ground of mutual love, peace, and equity, in our dealings with one another, than any of those petty differences and distinctions of strong and weak, rich and poor, wise and foolish, base and honourable, can be to encourage men to any thing of insolence, injustice, and dishonest dealing. Because that wherein we all agree, namely, that we are the creatures and children of God, and one common father, is essential and constant; but such things as we differ in, are accidental and mutable, and happen to one another by turns.

S E R M O N XVIII.

By BISHOP STILLINGFLEET.

The Incarnation of Christ agreeable to natural Reason.

JOHN, iii. 17.

For God sent not his Son into the world, to condemn the world, but that the world through him might be saved.

THE psalmist, meditating on God's providence to mankind, could not but with astonishment say, *Lord, what is man, that thou art mindful of him, and the son of man that thou so regardest him!* Indeed, what is man! but a mass of vanity and disorder; weak in his judgments, wilful in his passions, uncertain in his judgments, wilful in his worst inclinations, and with difficulty brought to understand and pursue his truest interest? What is such a creature as this, that a God infinitely wise and powerful, far above our thoughts and services, should

be concerned about him, and interfere with the low trifling affairs of mankind? But such is God's goodness and condescension, that he humbles himself, not only to inspect, but to govern the things that are done upon earth. But what is, man that he should visit him, not with the mere demonstrations of kindness, which other creatures also experience; but that God should visit him, *by sending his Son into the world, that the world through him might be saved?* and this when mankind had most heinously offended God by their sins, and deserved to be for ever rejected and forgotten by him. This as far exceeds our imaginations as deserts; and is so wonderful, that some make it a pretence for infidelity, as being an instance of mercy too great to be believed.

The sceptics of our age are ever cavilling against matters of revelation, more especially at this fundamental article of our Saviour's incarnation. For suppose, say they, "God intended to offer terms of salvation to mankind, yet this might be done without sending the Son of God into the world. Had not God easier methods to effect this, than by the incarnation and crucifixion of his Son? Is it not more credible, that God should forgive sin without any atonement, than send his Son to be a sacrifice of propitiation to himself? Is it not enough for us to believe all the principles of natural religion; for we own a God and providence, a life to come, rewards and punishments; but why must our faith be loaded with incredible mysteries, to believe the Son of God's coming into the world in such manner as is described by the Evangelists? This, so far from being a kindness to the world, makes the condition of salvation much harder, if we must believe what is so impossible, and difficult to be reconciled with the natural principles of reason and religion." I will not dispute whether this zeal for natural religion, is real or pretended, but shall endeavour to make it appear that whoever embraces the principles of natural religion, can have no reason to reject those of the Christian, even as to this article of God's sending his Son into the world, at which they seem most to stumble.

I shall therefore attempt to prove, that the Christian religion not only supposes,

poses, but improves, refines, establishes and enforces the general and most allowed principles of natural religion; as to the being of God and providence, the most agreeable way of worship, the nature and kinds of moral duties, the rewards and punishments of another world; since no one can deny that the Christian religion is very exact and particular in these things, above any other institution whatever; and therefore there is far less reason to quarrel with Christianity, than any other religion. Let our sceptics view the unchristian world, and they will find such foolish notions, vain superstitions, incoherent fables, and immoral practices allowed by their several religions, as to make a considering man wonder, how the notion of religion could be so debased among men. Let them examine former ages, and they will find false gods, and false worship established in opposition to the true; a worship perfectly disagreeable to the divine nature, by mean representations, impure rites, and barbarous sacrifices; such innumerable defects in their own principles of morality, as to conjugal society, the rights of property, and preservation of mankind; also such low representations of future rewards and punishments, as seem more like fables, than worthy of any wise man's notice and regard. But I dare challenge the most cavilling sceptic to find any just fault with the duties of Christianity; for the worship of God therein required, is pure, holy, spiritual, very agreeable to divine nature and the common reason of mankind. The moral precepts of it are clear, weighty, and comprehensive. Those who delivered them to us, neither commend any vice, nor sink the reputation of any virtue; they never lessen our duties to God, or to one another; all the complaint is, that the precepts are too strict, severe, and difficult for mankind to practise. But is this an objection against our religion? or not rather against mankind? We hope the blame then is not to be charged on reason or religion, that men will not understand nor resolve to do their duty, but on themselves.

It shall then be my endeavour to prove, that the principles of natural religion make the design of God's sending his Son into the world to appear very credible, and fit for men of sense and understanding to believe. My reasons for this

are; first, that the great end of Christ's coming into the world, was the salvation of mankind, and this is most agreeable to God's infinite wisdom and goodness. Whoever believes a God, must for the same reason be convinced, that he is a Being of infinite goodness and wisdom; these being essential and inseparable attributes of the divine nature. And supposing mankind to be compounded of soul and body, capable of pleasure and satisfaction both in this and another world; as having a soul of an immortal nature, that will for ever subsist in happiness or misery after this life; (for otherwise future rewards and punishments will signify nothing :) the question then is, which is most agreeable to the infinite wisdom and goodness of God, either to continue mankind in this low and gloomy region for ever, or advance them into a far better place and company, there to enjoy noble and divine delights, not depending on a fading dying life, but on the enjoyment of complete and perpetual happiness both of soul and body? There can be no comparison between these things, if they are duly and seriously considered. So that the salvation tendered by the gospel, is the most agreeable end, which the wisdom and goodness of God could contrive for the benefit of mankind. But perhaps some will object, that there is no reason to hope for, or expect a happiness, so transcending our deserts. This objection would be the more reasonable, were we to suppose the rewards of another life came from any other fountain than God's infinite goodness, towards those who sincerely love and endeavour to please him, though with many failings and imperfections. But this is what we maintain to be the Christian doctrine. And is this repugnant to the wisdom and goodness of God? What was it, but infinite goodness, which at first gave being to the world, made it so useful and beneficial to mankind, and hath preserved it ever since? What is it, but infinite goodness, that suffers us to live, and enjoy so many comforts of life, after our great and continued provocations? Were we to argue from our deserts, it would be impossible to justify the wonderful patience of God, towards the sinful race of mankind, who have long since deserved to be utterly destroyed. If we consider how the justice and holiness of God is daily pro-

voked to punish offenders, and that he hath power to execute his justice in a moment, without any to oppose or resist him; we have reason to be astonished at that exceeding patience and forbearance of God, which all such every day experience. Nor is this all; for he not only suffers them to live, but often makes their condition here easy and prosperous, giving them health, riches, and honour, and the hopes that their posterity shall enjoy the same after them. These things, to such as do not believe or value another life, are the greatest blessings God can confer on them. But if they can allow so much goodness in God, towards those who continually offend him; why should they question greater instances of it in another world, towards those that endeavour to please him? Why then is it more unreasonable for God to bestow the happiness of another life, on those who esteem and chuse it, than to give temporal blessings to such as love and admire it? not that this wisdom is equal in the choice, but the goodness of God is wonderful in both. And there is no reason to suppose, that God should be less kind to those who love him best. But then it is vain to think of being saved by Christ's coming into the world, unless we heartily love God and keep his commandments; the design of the gospel being to persuade us to the one, in order to our obtaining the other; therefore it is not hope, but a fond imagination, to expect salvation by Christ on any other terms. If then we take the whole true scheme of Christianity together, it is this; *God sent his Son into the world, that the world through him might be saved*; not by continuing in the sinful practices of this world, which St. John calls *the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life*; but by subduing and mortifying all disorderly passions, and preparing for a better state: so that if we may have a firm persuasion of the goodness of God, of which we may be convinced by natural reason; why should it be thought hard to believe, that God should have in view so great and good an end, as the eternal salvation of those who truly love and obey him?

The next principle agreeable to natural reason and religion is, that salvation, or a future state of happiness, cannot be expected without the particular favour

of God. Whoever owns natural religion, must agree that the soul of man is an immortal thinking being; its happiness then must consist in thinking on such things, as afford the greatest pleasure and satisfaction: but what can we conceive sufficient to entertain and please the mind, when the soul is dislodged from this cloudy mansion the body? Will it be to reflect on the past pleasures of the body? No, certainly; for these cannot now bear a severe reflection, the thoughts of them making men very uneasy: for the most tempting pleasures of sin, leave no grateful relish behind them. Or, can the mind lull itself asleep, and cease thinking? But this would be a kind of annihilation. Indeed, there is a state of unthinking in this world, I mean when the mind is so full of trifling vain imaginations, as to leave no room for one serious thought: but this is impossible in another state. Nothing then will support or comfort the mind, but what will bear a most strict and severe scrutiny; it must be true and real good, durable and lasting, complete and perfect, to gratify all the just and reasonable desires of an immortal soul; and what can this be less than God himself? And therefore the Christian religion speaks most agreeably to natural reason, when it supposes the happiness of another world to consist in the presence and enjoyment of God.

This prospect of another state, or the salvation of mankind by Christ Jesus, opens to us a view of what relates to the Son of God's coming into the world. And if our minds are possessed with such great apprehensions of the power and greatness of the world; let us then consider the manner of God's sending his Son into the world; as his being born of an obscure virgin, laid in a common manger, bred in a private place, having so mean followers, meeting with so cold a reception, and at last exposed to an ignominious death; all these are circumstances of great reproach and contempt: but, on the other side, could we here raise our minds to such ideas of things, as the glorious spirits have above, who esteem things according to the ends and purposes they are designed for, we should then perceive how these methods contributed to God's great end; which was to wean men from the pomp and vanity of this

this world, and prepare them for a better. The design of Christ's coming was to deliver the souls of men from their own sinful passions and the devil's tyranny : but he did not come in a way of violence, to break open the prison doors, and instantly knock off their fetters and set them free ; but he uses all gentle and effectual methods of persuasion, both by words and his own example, that they might despise this world, and prepare for another, where their happiness will be inconceivable and without end.

Another principle of natural religion is, that God's favour is not to be expected, so long as his displeasure continues against mankind for sin, and that no effectual means are used to remove it. In truth, the gospel scheme turns on this point ; whether God was really so displeased with mankind for their sins as to need a reconciliation ? For if what the scripture declares concerning God's wrath and displeasure against men for sin, be only figurative expressions, then the design of the gospel must be given up, as a mere scheme ; since if God was not really displeased, there would be no need of reconciliation ; if that was not wanted, Christ's coming to reconcile us to God was needless ; and if he did not come for that end, we have no reason to believe the scripture which so frequently affirms it : nor can there be a stronger argument produced to prove a thing, than that the most emphatical expressions are so often applied to that purpose, by persons who used all sincerity and plainness. But though the scripture is very clear herein, yet this is not my present business ; which is to consider the natural sense and reason of mankind as to this matter. But as an infinite perfect Being cannot in reason be supposed to have any such passion, as we call wrath and anger in men ; therefore wrath in God must be interpreted to mean, a just cause of displeasure given by us, and deserving his punishment, unless it be removed. Whether there is any such just cause of displeasure, must depend on the natural differences of good and evil ; and whoever exercises his reason, cannot judge amiss in this matter : not that all the differences of good and evil are equally clear, no more than all the propositions in the mathematics. It is sufficient to the present purpose, that the greater in-

stances and more general principles are so. And can any one of common sense imagine, that God is as well pleased with him who blasphemes his name, despises his service, and hates religion, as with one who fears, honours, and endeavours to please him ? Can he be as well pleased with him who assassins his parents, as with him who obeys them ? With him that robs and defrauds his neighbour, as with him that relieves his necessities ? With him who encourages disorderly passions, as with him who subdues them ? With him who is cruel, inhuman, and perfidious, as with him who is faithful, just, and compassionate ? These are only a few instances of the difference between good and evil ; but they are so plain and notorious, that a man must renounce the common principles of humanity, who does not acknowledge them : and if there is such a real difference in the nature of human actions, and God a strict observer of them, which he must be, as he is a Being of infinite holiness and justice ; he cannot but be offended with mankind's wilful omission of what they know to be good, and commission of what they know to be evil.

But then we must distinguish between God's displeasure against actions and persons ; the former is the necessary effect of sin, which can never be removed, God being irreconcilable to sin. But those who commit sin are his creatures, and capable of mercy and forgiveness. Punishment is the natural desert of sin ; but in punishing sinners, the great and wise Governor of the world acts not by necessity of nature, but by the methods of wisdom and justice. And if the saving of sinners on their repentance, can be made agreeable to these his attributes, such is the mercy and goodness of God to his creatures, that there is great reason to hope for a reconciliation. For though God may be displeased, he is not implacable ; and though justly provoked to punish sinners, yet there is no absolute necessity nor irreversible decree to oblige him to it ; and therefore, notwithstanding this displeasure of God, there is still a way left for reconciliation ; which leads me to another natural principle, namely,

That if God is thus displeased with the sins of mankind, and there is a possibility of reconciliation between God and them ;

them; then he alone is the most proper and competent judge on what terms he will be reconciled; for being both the offended party and supreme governor, he hath the sole and only right to fix the terms and conditions, on which he will forgive sins, and receive the offenders to favour. It is weak and absurd to oppose one attribute of God against another. Some are so vain as to think God will easily forgive sins, because he is merciful; not considering that he is also just and holy; and there is as much reason to fear his justice, as to hope for his mercy: so that it is impossible for a considering man to satisfy his own mind, as to God's forgiving his sins, unless he is some way assured he will do it; and therefore, if God designs to bring men to repentance, by the hopes of forgiveness, this cannot be known but by revelation. But mere repentance can never make any satisfaction to God for the breach of his laws. Suppose a sinner is heartily sorry for all his offences against God, and resolves to do otherwise for the future; this no doubt is more pleasing to God, than to persevere in offending him. But then this is no more than what a man ought to do, in justice to God and himself; for he is obliged to vindicate the honour of God's laws, to condemn himself for his own folly, and return to his duty. But this makes no amends to God, for the infinite dishonour done him by the violation of his laws. Among men, the courts of justice take no notice of malefactors' repentance; however such are affected, the laws must be observed and offenders punished. No person then, by mere natural reason, can be assured, that God will not be as tender of the honour and justice of his laws, as mankind are allowed to be of theirs, without any imputation of cruelty and injustice. If God should be exact in punishing offenders, who could complain? For who can plead not guilty to his maker? When a man's own conscience tells him he hath deserved punishment, there is all reason to expect it, but none to hope for pardon. Therefore to forgive even penitent sinners, is a free act of grace and mercy in God; and upon what terms and conditions he will do it, solely depends on his good pleasure. But the way of reconciliation cannot be known by any principles of nature; because it is a matter of fact, and must

have such proof, of which a thing of that nature is capable.

Having thus shewed, how strongly the principles of natural religion favour the Christian doctrine of God's sending his Son into the world, in order to our reconciliation with, and salvation by him; it will be necessary to prove, that God justly requires us to believe it true. For *he that believeth on him is not condemned; but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God; for whosoever believeth in him shall not perish, but have everlasting life.* But can we believe farther than we have reason to believe? No; God does not expect it; but only that with sincere and impartial minds we weigh and consider the evidence, and with great humility beg the assistance of divine grace, without which God may justly leave us to unbelief.

It would be too tedious to produce the several arguments which might be urged, to prove it as evident as a matter of fact can be made; that *God did send his Son, that the world through him might be saved.* I shall therefore only observe at present, that if the matters of fact are true, as related by the Evangelists, there can be no reason to doubt his being the Son of God. For he who was the most exact pattern of humility and self-denial, not only frequently assumes this title to himself, and also his disciples affirm the same; but God himself gave the most ample and convincing testimony to it by his miraculous birth, and a voice from heaven at his baptism; by a series of public and beneficial miracles to attest the truth of his doctrine; by his resurrection from the dead, ascension into heaven, and wonderful effusion of the Holy Ghost, which was attended with strange effects. And whoever believes these things true, has no reason to say, he cannot believe Christ to be the Son of God. But if these matters of fact are not to be believed as true, we have no reason to believe any thing but what we see ourselves. For in this case, distance of time and place are equal, nor is there any matter of fact so well attested as these are. For these things were not conveyed by silent tradition, but exposed to public examination; they were not delivered by a few, trusted with a secret; but openly avowed by a great number of competent witnesses who were present;

present; none of whom could be compelled, by the greatest sufferings, to deny, falsify, or conceal any part of their evidence. And these things thus delivered by persons who were most remarkable for their innocency and integrity, were in the next ages examined and enquired into by men of sagacity and learning, who, on the strictest scrutiny, found no reason to suspect their testimony, and therefore heartily embraced and defended the Christian faith. From whence they have been conveyed down to us, not by uncertain oral tradition, but by writings of unquestionable authority; wherein, among other doctrines, this is contained, *that God sent his Son into the world, for the salvation of mankind.*

Let them all who pretend they are willing to believe as much as they can, and those also who incline to infidelity, seriously consider with themselves; whether there can be a greater and nobler design, more becoming the wisdom, power, and goodness of God to engage in, than that of rescuing mankind out of misery, and shewing them a certain way to eternal happiness? Whether such a design must not be discovered in some particular age of the world, with all the circumstances relating thereto? Whether that age was not the most proper, wherein the chief prophecies of the Messiah's coming were to be accomplished? Whether, because it is possible for some to deceive, there is reason to infer, that there is nothing but illusion and imposture in the world, and that all men lie and deceive for the sake of doing it? But if a difference is to be made between men and their testimonies, then we are to examine the different characters of truth and falsehood, and according to them give our assent. And if, after the severest examination, we find not sufficient reason to believe, *that God sent his Son into the world, for the salvation of mankind*, upon such testimonies as are given of it; we must conclude all mankind to be made up of fraud and imposture, and that there is no sincerity and honesty in the world: which are reproaches so severe on human nature, as none can be guilty of, who have any regard to it. Surely then, it is a great advantage to the truth of our religion, that it cannot be rejected, but by such methods as equally destroy all truth and certainty; the faith of Christianity

standing on the same bottom with the common faith of mankind: and if we reject such assurance as is offered for the faith of the gospel, our infidelity cannot be the effect of reason and argument, but of suspicion and mistrust of the best part of mankind; who have most firmly believed the truth of these things, and led the most holy exemplary lives, in hopes of a blessed immortality. And if the testimony of any persons merit regard, it must be of such as could have no design on this world, but were resolved by faith and patience to prepare for a better.

Let none then who profess themselves Christians, be ever discouraged by any attempts of Infidels, to let go the anchor of their hope, or mistrust the foundation of their faith; but we must not think our faith will avail us, unless our lives are answerable thereto. The Son of God, who assumed our nature, requires that we should imitate the perfections of his. A daily progress in virtue is the indispensable duty of every disciple of the blessed Jesus. And whoever attentively considers the wonderful display of God's mercy to us in his incarnation, can want no motive to praise, adoration, and love. Let us then contemplate a little on this amazing instance of divine goodness. As the book of nature furnishes us with the clearest and most convincing manifestations of God's wisdom and power; so does his revealed word supply us with the most ample testimonies of the wonders of his love. That the Son of God should become man, that the children of men might become the sons of God; that he should clothe himself with our infirmities, to raise us to a participation of his perfections; should suffer want, that we may abound; make himself an offering for sin, to free his rebellious creatures from the guilt and dominion of it; and die the death of a malefactor, that we might live forever with him in eternal glory: these are such instances of infinite love, as could only proceed from himself. This is such a method of salvation, as wretched mortals could never have expected; such as the most sanguine mind could not have hoped for. What breast does not glow with grateful resentments upon the very mention of this stupendous love? Who can consider it without being lost in adora-

tion, praise, and thanksgiving? Who can view this wonderful condescension, and these sufferings for sin, without detesting and resolving to forsake it? Who does not say within himself, with the greatest indignation, how can I live any longer in sin, who am redeemed from my iniquities by the blood of Christ? Well therefore might the Apostle call this doctrine a mystery of godliness. A mystery, which gives us the most exalted notions of divine love, to warm our hearts with a due sense of it; which, if there be any sparks of ingenuity or gratitude in our souls, must kindle it into a divine flame, an unfeigned love, and pure affection! A mystery, which must depress the man as much as it exalts the Christian; make him desirous of purifying himself; and thirst for nothing so much as to become a new creature! A mystery, which by shewing us our approach to, and deliverance from the jaws of hell, gives us the nearest prospect of the joys of heaven, and the surest pledge and assurance to us, that he, who has already done so much towards it, will not stop till he has completed the great work of our salvation!

Blessed be God, for ever blessed be his holy name, who hath found out a way for our deliverance, and hath raised up for us a mighty salvation; that we, being delivered out of the hands of our enemies, may serve him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before him, all the days of our life. *Praise therefore the Lord, O our soul, and all that is within us, praise his holy name, and forget not all his benefits; who forgiveth all our iniquities, and healeth all our diseases; who hath redeemed our life from destruction, and hath crowned us with loving kindness and tender mercies.* What shall we now return unto him, who came down from his imperial throne, and infinitely debasing himself, and eclipsing the brightness of his glorious majesty, became a servant, nay, suffered the ignominious death of the cross for our sakes, that he might raise us up to eternal bliss and glory?

To him therefore let us offer up our souls, bodies, and spirits, not only to be saved, but to be ruled and governed by him. Let us humbly beg of him, that he will be pleased to finish that work in us, which he came into the world for; that by his blood he will cleanse and

wash us from all filthiness both of flesh and spirit; that he will save us from our sins, and then we shall escape everlasting misery hereafter.

S E R M O N XIX.

By GLOCESTER RIDLEY, LL. B.

The Divinity and Personality of the HOLY GHOST asserted from the New Testament.

ACTS, xix. 1, 2, 3.

And it came to pass, that while Apollos was at Corinth, Paul having passed through the upper coasts, came to Ephesus: and finding certain disciples,

He said unto them, Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed? And they said unto him, We have not so much as heard whether there be any Holy Ghost.

And he said unto them, Unto what then were ye baptized? And they said, Unto John's baptism.

ST. Paul, set apart to the ministry by the spirit of God, and by him directed and assisted in the discharge of it, applies himself with all diligence to the work; as occasions required, preaching the gospel (Acts, xiv. 21.); strengthening the disciples (Acts, xviii. 23.); ordaining elders (Acts, xiv. 23.); confirming the churches, (Acts, xv. 41.); and publishing the apostolical decrees. (Acts, xvi. 4.) When he met with disciples, to whose proficiency he was a stranger, the text informs us what method this skilful apostle took to let himself readily into a knowledge of it, in order to address himself the most properly to their necessities. The cardinal question with him was, *Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed?* But how astonished was he to hear the answer of these supposed Christians at Ephesus, *We have not so much as heard, whether there be any Holy Ghost!* Supposing them Christians, lately converted, as St. Paul apprehended, such ignorance was not to be accounted for: instruction in this point being of the very essence and first rudiments of their religion; *Unto what then,* says he, *were ye baptized?* They inform him, that they had never received Christ's baptism, only that of John. This sufficiently solved

solved the difficulty, and pointed out to the apostle what was necessary for these Ephesian disciples, which he accordingly supplies by baptism, (Acts, xvi. 5, 6.) and imposition of hands.

This passage of scripture will naturally lead us to observe, 'That a knowledge of the Holy Ghost is essential to Christianity,' as of one to whom we are consecrated at our baptism, and as an article of that faith required of every man before he be admitted to that sacrament. When the Ephesians tell St. Paul, *We have not so much as heard whether there be any Holy Ghost*, he immediately asks, *unto what then were ye baptized?* We learn farther, 'That it is not sufficient for a Christian barely to have a speculative knowledge or faith in the Holy Ghost, but also that he receive him.' *Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed?* Which will open to an enquiry 'into the expediency and necessity of receiving him,' which is of so great importance that St. Paul makes it his leading question in order to judge of the true state and proficiency of these Ephesian disciples. And this will fitly afford an occasion of considering 'the means by which the Holy Ghost is usually dispensed to us,' of which we have here some information, *They were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. And when Paul laid his hands upon them, the Holy Ghost came on them.* Points which our divinely instructed Apostle thought of the utmost importance to Christianity, and therefore never unseasonable from a Christian teacher: points immediately flowing from that mysterious truth, which this lecture was intended to inculcate, and therefore not foreign to the occasion of my appearing here at this time: and as the learning of my predecessors has omitted nothing which relates to the other branch of this doctrine, viz. the second person of the ever blessed Trinity, it becomes the most proper business of their successor to apply himself to this less cultivated province: and I wish I could not add, that the carelessness of many supposed Christians sinking them almost into the state of the Ephesian disciples, of not knowing whether there be any Holy Ghost, and the unwholesome remedies which mistaken zeal has applied to reform this evil, have made an attempt of this kind now par-

ticularly necessary. I shall therefore endeavour to inform the ignorant, and satisfy the perplexed Christian in the four following points;

I. That there is an Holy Ghost; wherein I shall endeavour to state the scripture doctrine of his essence and personality.

II. In what manner he is received; and how we may know whether we have received him or not.

III. To what ends the receiving of him is necessary. And,

IV. The means by which we may receive him.

In treating of which, may the Blessed Spirit, who is the subject of them, so cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by his gentle inspiration, that all carnal affections being subdued, they may be open to receive his light and truth, in the sober use of those means which he has appointed, prayer, (James, i. 5.) and the word of God! (John, v. 39.)

First I shall shew that there is an Holy Ghost, and endeavour to state the scripture doctrine of his essence and personality.

Spirit, or in old British, Ghost, is a name of kind, taken in scripture rather negatively, in opposition to what it is not, than defining what it is; as, *a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see me have* (Luk. xxiv. 39.): and it is likewise distinguished from the animal soul and flesh, as by St. Jude, *sensual [or animal] having not the Spirit*. Wherefore it would be a great mistake to ascribe to the Holy Ghost such effects and operations, as owe themselves only to the flesh or animal life. To these it is really opposed; but it is called a Spirit only by a metaphor or analogy, as the nearest approach which the grossness of our ideas, the types of sensible objects, can make to the true nature of it. Its subtilty, and activity, mighty in its effects, but indiscernable in its operation, are the points of comparison; and therefore applied to God, and to angels whether good or evil, and to the human or rational soul. But when applied to these, it would be absurd to understand the word in its strict and proper signification, so as to infer the same qualities, properties, and effects in them, as in the air or wind itself. If God for his powerful and boundless energy be called a

spirit, and be described as *flying upon the wings of the wind*, (Ps. xviii. 10.) yet would it be strange divinity to infer from thence an inconstancy and changeableness in him, *with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning*. (Jam. i. 17.) If *he maketh his angels spirits*, (Heb. i. 7.) *sent forth to minister for those who shall be heirs of salvation*, (Heb. i. 14.) the revelation, which tells us so, would be of little use, should we argue from thence, that their voice was delusive and unmeaning as the echo, repeating nothing but what ourselves first gave out; that they were in this respect *become wind also, and the word was not in them*. (Jer. v. 13.) So again the human soul, itself undiscerned, yet discovered by its effects, when we *hear the sound thereof* in the voice of reason, is called *the spirit that is in man*, (Job, xxxii. 8.) as it *blows where it listeth*, (Joh. iii. 8.) because we cannot command it to animate what mafs we please, and *know not whence it cometh or whither it goeth*; but to stretch the comparison farther than the points of similitude intended, would lead us to that false conclusion of the ungodly, that we shall be hereafter as though we had never been, because *the breath in our nostrils is as smoke, and our spirit shall vanish as the soft air*. (Wisd. ii. 2, 3.) As it hath pleased God to convey the knowledge of heavenly things to us only by the mediation of sensible objects, we must remember, that these sensible objects are but types and characters of what they signify, and not the things themselves; wherefore as the resemblance is not universal, the application should be limited; and not carried farther than scripture warrants, nor ever be interpreted literally, only by analogy: otherwise the wildest fancies and grossest conceits may be advanced as true divinity, if we will admit for such, all the conclusions which a lively imagination may extract from metaphor.

After having guarded against these grosser errors which rise from a confusion of kind, we may proceed to distinguish this spirit more particularly from all others, to which the name is common, by the character annexed, the Holy Ghost. It is therefore very different from the spirit that is in man, which was so disordered by the fall of Adam, that far from communicating holiness for the sanctify-

ing of others, it has none inherent in itself, but *every imagination of the thoughts of our hearts are only evil continually*. (Gen. vi. 5.) And still more so is it from those spirits or angels whose character is directly opposite to this, and who are called *evil angels*, (Psal. lxxviii. 49.) *soul*, (Mark, ix. 25.) *unclean spirits*. (Math. x. 1.) It remains then that this Holy Ghost is either one of the good angels, or the spirit and substance of God himself.

How immense soever the distance may be betwixt creature and creator, yet the soul of man is so inconveniently situated, as not easily to discern it through the interposition of the senses. If we usually take our accounts of the sun, not by his real appearance in the heavens, but by the shadows which he casts among us; how much more when we would *search out God, who dwells in the light which no man can approach unto*, (1 Tim. vi. 16.) must we be sent to judge of him by the dusky mediums that intervene? If *the invisible things of him are clearly seen*, (Rom. i. 20.) yet it is no otherwise than as they are *understood by the things that are made*. Right reason can proceed safe enough by making due use of the index, yet denying any exact resemblance; but imagination is apt to perplex us, by always representing the medium, and confounding the properties of the sign with the thing signified; and by mistaking these indices for just representations. Sceptics deny all divine truths, and bigots believe any absurdity. When God would exhibit himself to *Elijah*, and signify his power and anger against the impieties of Ahab and Jezabel, a great and strong wind rent the mountains, (1 Kings, xix. 11, 12.) after that came an earthquake, and after that a fire; yet the Lord was not in the wind, the earthquake, or the fire: so if God be called a spirit or a fire, we must not expect to find the real essence or attributes of God in those symbols; for they are both of them creatures: whence it must be great rashness to infer or conclude strictly from the symbols, as it will endanger either our faith, or our reason, and lead to infidelity or a blind credulity. In the point before us, the term itself will not discover to us, whether the spirit spoken of, be the divine nature to which it is sometimes applied

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plied analogically, or whether it be created substance, which it signifies properly. In order to discover this, we must search the scriptures, which alone can inform us what are the appropriate characters which distinguish God and the creature; and which of these characters are applied to the Holy Ghost. The divine nature is set forth to us, 1. by incommunicable attributes which flow from, and declare his essence: 2. by works which testify those attributes, and which are impossible for creatures to perform: and 3. by an appropriate honour, which is the creatures acknowledgment of him.

1. The incommunicable attributes, which flow from and declare his essence, are principally these; Omniscience, Omnipresence, Eternity, and Omnipotence. These cannot agree with the limited perfections of a creature, and are the scripture characters of God, whose understanding is infinite; (Psal. cxlvii. 5.) *the fulness which filleth all in all*; (Eph. i. 23.) *which is, and which was, and which is to come, the Almighty*. (Rev. i. 8.) The spirit then to which these attributes are given in scripture is God. But these are ascribed to the Holy Ghost, the spirit which *searcheth all things, yea the deep things of God*; (1 Cor. ii. 10.) *which leadeth into all truth*, (Joh. xvi. 13.) and is therefore called the *Spirit of Wisdom and Revelation*. (Eph. i. 17.) He is the very argument and testimony of God's Omnipresence, *who dwelleth in us* how widely soever dispersed and scattered by his spirit. (1 Joh. iv. 13.) He is called *the eternal spirit*; (Heb. ix. 14.) and though this text should be thought rather to signify the divine nature which was in Christ, than point to the Holy Ghost mentioned in the text, yet we cannot but conceive Him eternal whom we read of *moving upon the waters*, ere time began, before the evening and the morning made the first day, (Gen. i. 2.) and who *shall abide for ever*. (Joh. xiv. 16.) Nor can he be otherwise than Omnipotent, who is *the finger of God*, (Luk. xi. 20. compared with Math. xii. 28.) and *the power of the Highest*. (Luk. i. 35.) If any expect abatement to be made for these poetical expressions, as owing themselves to the oriental grandeur, I must observe, so far from that, that on the other side allowances must be

made for the poverty of language, which faints beneath the weight of that truth, it was intended to carry: which will appear by appealing,

2. To the works peculiar to God, and which are testimonies of his attributes. Thus St. Paul tells us, *His eternal power and godhead are clearly seen from the creation of the world*; (Rom. i. 20.) and God challenges it solely to himself without the aid or ministry of others; *I am the Lord that maketh all things, that stretcheth forth the heavens alone*. (Is. xlv. 24.) Yet by his word were the heavens made, and all the host of them by the spirit of his mouth, (Psal. xxxiii. 6.) and by his spirit he garnished the heavens. (Job, xxvi. 13.) So again it was God who *breathed into man the breath of life*, (Gen. ii. 7.) *in whom we live, move, and have our being*. (Acts, xvii. 28.) Yet holy Job tells us, that *the spirit of God made him, and the breath of the Almighty gave him life*. (Job, xxxiii. 4.) The divine power which (Rom. i. 4.) raised up Christ from the dead was the spirit of holiness, and who *likewise shall quicken our mortal bodies*, (Rom. viii. 11.) and the miracles which *none can do except God be with him*, (Joh. iii. 2.) are *the gifts* (1 Cor. ii. 4.) and *demonstration of the Spirit*. (1 Cor. xii. 4. 10.) From his omniscience he is enabled to *teach all things* (Joh. xiv. 26.); and from his omnipresence, to accompany the apostles, and give them power to be *witnesses both in Jerusalem and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth*. (Acts, i. 8.)

3. When God's attributes are proved from his works, he expects man's acknowledgment of his divinity by a peculiar honour, which honour he *will not give or allow to another*. (Is. xlii. 8.) Such are religious invocation and address; consecrating ourselves to his service by baptism; benediction in his name; and dedicating temples to him. Yet this honour we are allowed to pay to the Holy Ghost, but to no created power whatever. Thus our Saviour directs us, *Pray the Lord of the harvest that he would send forth labourers into the harvest*. (Matt. ix. 38.) But the Holy Ghost is the lord of the harvest; it was he that *separated Paul and Barnabus* (Acts, xiii. 2.); whose office in general it is to *appoint overseers over the flock to feed the church*

church of God (Acts, xx. 28.); and who is expressly mentioned as the lord of the harvest in this text by St. Luke, who tells us, as the most ancient MSS. read, that Christ chose the apostles through or by the Holy Ghost. And he only can be that third person distinct from the Father and the Son to whom St. Paul prays in both his epistles to the Thessalonians, *That the Lord would make them increase and abound in love, to the end he might establish their hearts in holiness before God even the Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.* And again, *The Lord direct your hearts into the love of God, and into the patient waiting for Christ.* (1 Thes. iii. 12, 13. 2 Thes. iii. 5.) The Lord here addressed to is neither the Father, nor the Son, and is sufficiently pointed out to be the Holy Ghost, as the author of love and of holiness. Another instance of this honour is renouncing all other Gods, and solemnly dedicating ourselves to the service of the true God, by being baptized into his name; an honour which St. Paul seems as fearful lest any should ascribe to him, as the angel in the Apocalypse lest St. John should worship him (Rev. xxii. 9.); and blesses God that he had baptized two only, lest any should say that he baptized in his own name (1 Cor. i. 15.): yet this baptism is appointed to be equally in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost (Matt. xxviii. 19.); and being then adopted by the Spirit, and born of the Spirit, we thereby become the sons of God. Another branch of religious worship is blessing: for this purpose the tribe of Levi was separated to stand before the Lord and to bless in his name. (Deut. x. 8.) When St. John wrote to the seven churches in Asia, he wishes them grace and peace not only from Him who was, and is, and is to come, but also from the seven spirits which are before his throne, and from Jesus Christ (Rev. i. 4.): where the number regards not a multiplicity of persons, but the manifold graces of the Holy Ghost. In which manner St. Paul blessed his Corinthians long before; *The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost be with you all. Amen.* (2 Cor. xiii. 14.) The fourth instance of religious honour was consecrating temples, which is al-

ways done either to the true, or to a falsely reputed God. And the true God reckons the building or making temples to others, as a forsaking of him. *Israel hath forgotten his Maker, and buildeth temples.* (Hos. viii. 14.) But our bodies are the temples of the Holy Ghost. (1 Cor. vi. 19.) And St. Paul avows the consequence, exhorting to flee fornication, lest we defile our bodies, for the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are. (1 Cor. iii. 17.) From these arguments, and more of the like nature, we should certainly be led to infer that the Holy Ghost is no other than the Divine Spirit, very God. And that we should be safe in such an inference appears from this, that the divinely instructed apostles themselves have often made it before us. Because the Holy Ghost dwells in us, therefore our bodies are the temples of God. St. Peter informs us that *Prophecy came not of old time by the will of man, but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.* (2 Pet. i. 21.) But St. Paul tells us that this Holy Ghost was God. *For all scripture, says he, is given by inspiration of God* (2 Tim. iii. 16.); and it was God who at sundry times, and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets. (Heb. i. 1.) Which justifies the conclusion generally drawn from the passage in the Acts, where the case of Ananias and Sapphira is related, *Why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie unto the Holy Ghost?—thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God.* (Acts. v. 3, 4.) Nay the very incommunicable name Jehovah is frequently ascribed to him by the evangelical writers. We are informed in the pentateuch that the Lord (יהוה) spake unto Moses, saying, *Let them make me a sanctuary that I may dwell among them; according to all that I shew thee, even so shall ye make it.* (Exod. xxv. 1. 8, 9.) St. Paul referring to this, says, that Moses was admonished of God, when he was about to make the tabernacle according to the pattern shewed him; which pattern he informs us was typical, a figure for the time present, *the Holy Ghost signifying thereby such and such truths* (Heb. viii. 5. comp. with Heb. ix. 9. See also Heb. viii. 10. comp. with Heb. x. 16.) And to mention no more, in the 6th of Isaiah, the prophet represents the Lord (Jehovah) sitting upon the throne,

high

high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple. Above stood the seraphim, and one cried unto the other and said, Holy, holy, holy, Lord God of Hosts, the whole earth is full of his glory. And Isaiah heard the voice of the Lord, saying, whom shall I send, and who will go for us? then said I, here am I, send me. And he said, go and tell this people, hear ye indeed, but understand not: and see ye indeed, but perceive not, &c. (Isaiah, vi. 1, 2, 3. 8.) There is no question made, but that this is the true God: yet here we have an intimation of a plurality in his essence, in the 8th verse. Whom shall I send, and who will go for us? and a farther intimation in the 3d verse, that this plurality is a Trinity, Holy, holy, holy, Lord God of Hosts! And agreeably to these intimations those inspired commentators, St. John and St. Luke, include the second and third persons of the Trinity in this idea of the Lord God of Hosts; the first ascribing the glory then seen to the Son (John, xii. 41.); and the latter, in his history of the Apostles, ascribing the words to the Holy Ghost. (Acts, xxviii. 25.)

If then that spirit, to which divine incommunicable attributes, works, honour, and names are ascribed, is God; and if divine revelation be the proper evidence from whence only we can receive information in this point, how can we conclude otherwise than that the Holy Ghost is God? Will it be said the evidence has been tampered with, and corrupted by the Catholics? Yet here the various copies, versions, and editions agree, abundantly sufficient to support the premises. Will they say the conclusion is illogical? Yet the first Christians, who are likely to be the best interpreters of scripture, were fully in the belief of it; future synods and councils found no cause to censure their faith in this article, but established it by their suffrages and decrees; nay the one half of our adversaries the Sabellians and Socinians have allowed it: only Arius and Macedonius, with such as fight from their tents, have had courage enough to encounter those arguments, and attack the divinity of the Holy Ghost. The others infer it so necessarily, as to persuade themselves, that he is no other than the very person of the Father, considered under a different mode of acting; or that he is a quality or energy of the

divine nature. But this is an error as little countenanced in scripture, as that which would degrade him into the rank of creatures, for from thence we learn that the Holy Ghost has a personal subsistence, and is therefore more than a quality or energy of the divine nature; and that this personal subsistence is distinct from the person of the Father, and also of the Son.

Thus, to know and to will are personal properties; but these are affirmed of the Holy Ghost. *The things of God knoweth no person but the spirit of God*, *οὐδεὶς ἐἴδεν τὰ κρυφὰ*. (1 Cor. ii. 11.) And, *all these worketh that one and the self-same spirit, dividing to every man severally as he will*. (1 Cor. xii. 11.) And agreeably hereto he is represented as *decreeing* (Acts, xv. 28.), as *appointing to the ministry* (Acts, xiii. 2.), as *speaking* (John, xvi. 13.), as *giving* (1 Cor. xii. 7.), and as *witnessing* (John, xv. 26.): he is also said to *come* (John, xvi. 13.), to *dwell* (Rom. viii. 9. 11.), to *be resisted* (Acts, vii. 51.), and the like, which with many more, naturally lead to the Catholic belief that the spirit thus characterised must be a person. And indeed Sabellius is consistent enough; for, as from the former arguments he acknowledges the Holy Ghost to be God, so from these he acknowledges him to be a person, no other than the person of God the Father. But the opinion of the Socinians finds no countenance here; a chief master in that school first lays down as a principle, that the Holy Ghost is a mere quality, neither a person nor a substance, for these two reasons; 1. Because he is called the Spirit of God, and the Spirit of Christ, therefore it is not a person itself, but only the quality of a person; and, 2dly, because it is elsewhere called the power of God, which is a mere quality, and we ought not without great and sufficient cause to leave the propriety of words, and explain them in an improper sense. But it has been already seen, that in divine subjects we cannot conclude strictly from the primary or proper signification of the terms. 2dly, I observe, that the Jews (and to them, and by them, was the revelation made) had other ideas of those terms than Crellius would recommend to us; they believed the spirit which is the soul of a man was the person of the man; and that a proselyte at his baptism received

ceived another spirit, or soul, whereby he became another man. Baptism therefore was called among them regeneration and a new birth, and the New Testament is full of allusions to these notions, which shews they were common at that time, as, being *born again* (John, iii. 3.), *putting off the old man* (Col. iii. 9.), *becoming new creatures* (2 Cor. v. 17.), and the like: so again power among the Jews, in theology, signified more than a quality; it certainly meant a person; when *angels, principalities, and powers* (Rom. viii. 38.) are ranked together, persons are meant at least, if not spirits that were persons, and Simon Magus was believed by some to be the great power of God: and among their writers the power signifies the person of God himself, agreeably to which our Saviour is described as sitting *at the right hand of power*. (Matth. xxvi. 64.) Wherefore by his own rule Crellius should have observed the propriety of idiom among those who used it, and thence inferred the personality of the Holy Ghost from his being the spirit of God, and the power of the Highest. And when to this so many personal properties are assigned to him in scripture, his old rule will never help him to guard against the Catholic conclusion. Others therefore have recourse to rhetoric, and resolve some of those expressions into a prosopopæia, by applying to the attribute that personality which properly belongs to him whose the attribute is; as, *the Holy Ghost said, separate me Saul and Barnabas*, means, that God by his wisdom said so. And where this figure will not serve their purpose, they suppose a metonymy, ascribing personal properties to the spirit of God, which belong to the man who is assisted by the spirit, as, *the spirit searcheth all things*, means, the true believing Christian, in whom God's spirit is, searcheth all things. But neither of these figures will interpret the personal properties ascribed to the Holy Ghost. There are no less than six ascribed to him in one single verse, *When he* (the other comforter understood) *the spirit of truth is come, he shall guide you into all truth; for he shall not speak of himself, but whatsoever he shall hear that shall he speak, and he shall shew you things to come*. (John, xvi. 13.) No figure will enable us to interpret this text quite through, either of the person of the Father, of whom the Holy Ghost

is supposed to be an attribute; or of the persons of the Apostles, to whom it was promised to be communicated. If of the latter, this must be the English of it; the Apostles by the assistance of divine wisdom shall come, and guide themselves into all truth, and shew themselves things to come. Neither can we interpret it of the person of the Father, and say, that when he shall guide them into all truth, yet *he shall not speak of himself, but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak*. From whom should he hear it? Our Saviour proceeds, *he shall receive of mine and shew it unto you*. That is, the Father shall receive knowledge of the man Christ Jesus (as the Socinians teach) and shew it to the Apostles. But if our Saviour says, *he shall receive of mine*, because *all things which the Father hath are mine*, then to interpret it of the person of the Father makes this nonsense of it; he shall not speak of himself, but whatsoever he hears or receives of himself, that shall he shew. Such artful expositors of scripture are the Socinian writers! Their faith disdains mysteries: nothing less than absurdities will satisfy them. So that the Holy Ghost is undoubtedly a person; for he has personal attributes or properties assigned him, which no figure can account for, in referring them either to the person of God the Father, whose the spirit is; or to the person of the believing Christian, to whom the spirit is communicated.

Nor is he only represented in scripture as a person, but also as a person plainly distinct from the Father; *I will send unto you from the Father the spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father*. (John, xvi. 26.) And in other places he stands personally distinguished both from the Father and the Son. As in the form of baptism; *in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost*. (Matth. xxviii. 19.) The words point to a distinction of persons, and the doctrine of baptism confirms such an interpretation. For at the first baptism, I mean that of Christ himself, they were all three present, and had distinct personal offices; *It came to pass that Jesus being baptized, . . . the Holy Ghost descended in a bodily shape like a dove upon him, and a voice came from heaven, saying, Thou art my beloved Son, in thee I am well pleased*. (Mark, i. 11. Luke, iii. 22.) And in the future baptism of Christians, the mercy of God the Father

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Father saves us, by the renewing of the Holy Ghost shed on us through Christ. So again the form of benediction, *The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Ghost* (2 Cor. xiii. 14.), denotes three persons with their æconomical characters.

I might proceed to multiply texts, but I think these are sufficient, to prove against Socinus, that the Holy Ghost is a person, and not a mere quality or attribute only. Also, against Sabellius, that the person of the Holy Ghost is distinct from the person of the Father and the Son: as we had before proved against Arius and Macedonius, that the Holy Ghost was God.

Truths, which not only the Catholic church of Christ has always maintained, as drawn from, and proved by clear testimony of divine revelation; but which also our adversaries have divided among them, and therein approved our exposition. Does the church teach that the Holy Ghost is God? So acknowledge Sabellius and Socinus, not prejudiced in favour of the Catholic opinion, but convinced by the plainness of the scripture proofs, which they think so strong, as to infer from thence, that he is no other than God the Father. Does the church teach moreover, that the Holy Ghost is a person, and distinct from the Father? The evidence for this is so obvious through the New Testament, that Arius and Macedonius, as little biased by the authority of the church as the others were, draw the same conclusions from the same scriptures; and believe him a person so distinct, as to make him a creature. Search the scriptures; their obvious meaning teaches this doctrine: if we doubt, consult their early expositors; this is their interpretation: examine what adversaries say; they are not agreed together, but the result of their evidence is a concession of these truths. Appeal to councils; this is their decreed form of faith. From all which, we believe in the *Holy Ghost; the Lord and giver of life; therefore a person: proceeding from the Father; and therefore distinct from him: who with the Father and the Son together be worshipped and glorified; which ought not to be, unless he be God.*

As to the procession of the Holy Ghost from the Father and the Son, there was a dispute which long subsisted

betwixt the eastern and western churches. The eastern chose to stick close to the words of scripture, which expressly mentions only his procession from the Father: and were jealous of the western church, lest they should insinuate two fountains of the Divinity, while they maintained his procession from the Son, as well as from the Father. But the western church intended no such conclusion as the Greeks were afraid of; yet held the procession from the Son, because the Father and the Son were, not two separate fountains of divinity to the Holy Ghost, but one God, one undivided source and original: and maintained their opinion by an easy deduction from scripture, which teaches us that he is *the spirit of God* (1 Cor. vi. 11.); and call him, if sometimes *the spirit of the Father*, so at other times *the spirit of the Son* (Gal. iv. 6.) and *of Christ*. (Rom. viii. ix. Phil. i. 19. 1 Pet. i. 11.) If the Father be said to send him, so also Christ promises, *I will send him to you*. (John, xv. 26.) If he be said expressly to proceed from the Father, he is no less clearly intimated to proceed from the Son, as when he says the Holy Ghost *de meo accipiat, shall receive of mine*. (John, xvi. 14.) But if jealousy of error began the dispute, a proper indignation in the Greeks widened it, because the Latins presumed to add the clause to their creed, without the sanction of a council. However, they are and were all along agreed in the truth itself, that the Holy Ghost is the spirit of both: the caution of the Greeks was not meant to deny so much, nor the forwardness of the Latins to assert more.

The Holy Ghost therefore is, "a person, proceeding from the Father and the Son, distinct from each," and "God:" to which when we have added, that "yet there is but one God," and that he is consequently "not another but the same God with the Father and the Son;" we have then declared the whole scripture account of what the Holy Ghost is.

And here our adversaries triumph over the credulity of the Catholic Christians, whose faith can swallow such absurdities. For this, anti-scripturists reject the evidence of divine revelation, and heretical scripturists explain it away: both betraying their consent, that the plain sense of scripture is against them; both agreeing to supersede its authority, and carry their appeal

appeal from thence to the senses. But it is as absurd, as an appeal of sounds to the eye, or of colours to the ear. How can they be the sufficient judges of what never fell within their notice, of what *neither eye has seen, nor ear heard?* (1 Cor. ii. 9.) The terms in which the truths are expressed, we acknowledge are improper; and if strictly taken, and pursued through all their consequences, will certainly lead us into error, if not into absurdity. But it is not our faith in the Trinity only, but our faith in God, that is subject to the same inconveniencies. We are informed, that *the eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and his ears are open to their prayers, but the face of the Lord is against them that do evil.* (1 Pet. iii. 12.) Yet how is this consistent with our faith, that God has neither body, parts, or passions? Or if we believe that God is infinite, our idea is existence in every point of space, which implies multiplicity, or extension; but God is one, as well as without parts; and to make a multitude of one, is not less a mystery than the Trinity, and extension without parts is an absurdity in philosophy. Such inadequate judges are our senses of spiritual and divine truths! So unworthily do our imaginations delineate them! That we cannot form full, clear, and consistent ideas of them, is not owing to any real absurdity in the doctrines, but the disproportion of our faculties to receive them: and their being above human comprehension, is an argument that they did not spring from human invention. But of what use then is reason in religion, if it be inadequate to divine subjects? Must we not check its enquiries, and believe implicitly? By no means: religion is supreme reason; and though we are too short-sighted to discover all the agreements and harmony which constitute it, yet certainly we ought not to shut our eyes on that account; we are religious creatures only because we are reasonable ones. And revelation is so far from curbing and confining the exercise of reason, that on the contrary it enlarges it, opens a wider field to expatiate in, gives new principles to build upon, a greater variety of premises to conclude from. The error of bigots and free-thinkers too, is in not giving sufficient freedom and scope to thought. The first wrap up their talent in a napkin, unreasonably dreading the austerity of their

Master: the others venture but half their principle, and use but a moiety of the treasure put into their hands; their reason travels no farther than their eyes or ears, nor listens (though God himself speaks) to any thing but the report of their senses. Whereas truths revealed by God, must be as solid a foundation to conclude from, as our own experience. The senses are indeed placed as centinels to guard against error: and therefore lest we should reject God's word, or give an easy ear to human imposture, he has been pleased to give sensible evidence that it came from him, and seal his revelations with variety of miracles. But when our senses have satisfied us, that the revelation does come from God, their judgment afterwards would be very impertinent concerning the properties, affections, and relations of divine objects. But reason proceeds never the less safe, and unbarassed, and judges from proper evidence; not measuring heavenly things by sensible, but laying the several parts of the revelation together, and *comparing spiritual things with spiritual.* (1 Cor. ii. 13.) *What sign shewest thou?* (John, ii. 18.) was a fair and just question of the Jews to our Saviour, that they might be convinced that he came from God: accordingly he appeals to his future resurrection, and when he *was risen from the dead, the word which Jesus had said was believed.* (John, ii. 22.) But when Nicodemus, who had acknowledged him to be a teacher sent from God, impertinently asked him of his doctrine, *How can these things be?* (John, iii. 9.) instead of explication, he rests himself upon the authority and sufficiency of the evidence. *Verily, verily, I say unto thee, we speak that we do know, and testify that we have seen.* (Ver. 11.) Nor need we apprehend that at this rate the grossest contradictions may be admitted, and that transubstantiation itself will stand on as safe a footing as the doctrine of the Trinity: for this plain observation may be made; that when both the terms of a proposition are used only in an analogical, and not a proper sense, or our ideas are inadequate both to the subject and the predicate, we shall more easily fancy a contradiction than prove it: but the case is otherwise where the terms are objects of our senses, as in transubstantiation; there, though we cannot be proper judges of the divine

divine virtue and efficacy communicated to the elements by the power of God, yet our senses are as good judges after consecration, as before, whether the elements continue in their substance bread and wine or not.

Others may say, that after the revelation is admitted for divine, it is not always easy to ascertain the sense and meaning of that revelation: how may we be satisfied about that? Here recourse must be had to the original languages in which the revelation was delivered, to grammar and criticism, history and antiquity, to the best MSS, versions, and editions, to the quotations and interpretations of the primitive Christians, to the faith of the Catholic church, their disputes with heretics, and the decrees of general councils. All these conspire in support of the doctrine which has been now delivered.

Lastly, it may be asked, if this doctrine is of so great importance as the Catholics suppose it to be, how comes it to pass, that it was so lately discovered? That the Gentiles should be suffered to sit in such gross darkness for 4000 years; and the Jews themselves, those favourites of heaven, the nation of priests, who were entrusted with the divine oracles for the instruction of the world, should be totally ignorant of it? As the point supposed in the objection seems to receive some countenance from the text, where we find that the disciples, whether Jews or Greeks, (for both were St. Paul's auditors at Ephesus,) had yet never so much as heard whether there was any Holy Ghost; I intend (God willing) in my next lecture to occur at large to this objection.

In the mean time we need not fear to conclude with the words of Dionysius of Alexandria, a celebrated Father in the third century, and whom (from his warm, and perhaps too uncircumspect opposition to Sabellianism) the Arians challenge as their own, who concludes his defence of himself with this form of doxology, derived to him from his ancestors in the faith, which shews us at once his own sense, and that of Catholic antiquity.

To God, both the Father and the Son our Lord Jesus Christ, with the Holy Ghost, be ascribed glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.

S E R M O N XX.

Why necessary to receive the Holy Ghost.

TITUS, iii. 3, 4, 5, 6, 7.

For we ourselves also were sometimes foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful and hating one another.

But after that the kindness and love of God our Saviour toward man appeared,

Not by works of righteousness, which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost;

Which he shed on us abundantly, through Jesus Christ our Saviour:

That being justified by his grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life.

HAVING proved the divinity and personality of the Holy Ghost; and answered at large an objection urged against the novelty of this doctrine; having also explained the manner of receiving the Holy Ghost, shewing what his gifts and graces are, and how to distinguish them from counterfeits; I proceed to

The third enquiry which I proposed to make, namely, into the expediency of receiving the Holy Ghost: What is the end and benefit thereof?

Of great importance we should suspect it to be from St. Paul's making it his leading question to the Ephesian converts, *Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed?* (Acts, xix. 2.) How great that importance is, is very explicitly set forth in the words before us. The sum of it is salvation; *according to his mercy he saved us by the washing of regeneration and renovation of or by the Holy Ghost.* The parts which make up this salvation are, 1. An exemption from punishment by our acquittal in judgment, *being justified*; and, 2. A promise of great reward, *eternal life.* Both acts of mercy; for we of ourselves could not stand in that judgment, being as he describes *foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful, and hating one another*; wherefore our justification is an effect of great love and kindness, it proceeds *not from works of righteousness which we have done, but we are justified by grace*: much less could we claim eternal life, which follows only upon such justification, and even then by promise, not of necessity; being thereby *made heirs* not necessarily

necessarily but *through hope of eternal life*. The whole is ascribed to the *Holy Ghost shed on us abundantly through Christ*.

This representation is built upon a supposition that we are all sinners; the truth of this we must be convinced of, before we can be sensible of our want of grace, or apply ourselves in earnest to the means of receiving it.

We have seen the character St. Paul gives of the Christians in his time, that they were deep immersed in their sins when the gospel found them. And *suppose ye that those Galileans were sinners above all the Galileans?* (Luke, xiii. 2.) or that the Greeks and Barbarians were less corrupt? The Gentiles are plainly implied in the character when he says, *ἡμεῖς γὰρ καὶ ἡμεῖς*. We ourselves *also were sometimes foolish, disobedient, &c.* even we as well as others. And in his epistle to the Romans he gives a dreadful description of the Heathen world, so bent to sin, that they were abandoned to it, given up to vile affections and a reprobate mind. (Rom. i. 26. 28.) He tells us elsewhere, that *all have sinned* (Rom. iii. 23.); *all the world is guilty before God*. (Rom. iii. 19.) *Jew and Gentile are concluded under sin*. (Rom. iii. 9.) The writers of the Old Testament give the same account; *there is none that doeth good, no not one* (Ps. xiv. 3.); *there is not a just man that doeth good, and sinneth not*. (1 Kings, viii. 46.) The Pagans give the same account; St. Paul's contemporary Seneca complains that every one has sinned more or less; that there is not a man to be found who could acquit himself; that the misfortune of human nature is such, that there is a necessity and love of sinning; and he informs us, not only what men were at that time of day, but that heretofore they had sinned, and would continue to do so as long as they lived. All history and philosophy attest this truth; all laws, precepts, and government suppose it. But the strongest unhappiest proof of all, is, that every one of us knows it by experience; and *if we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us*. (1 John, i. 8.) Was the case otherwise, we should have no occasion for, no interest in a Saviour; the end of his coming was *to save sinners* (1 Tim. i. 15.), they are the object of his mercy, and all men are the object of his mercy, for *the grace of God to salva-*

tion has appeared unto all men (Tit. ii. 11.); and the gospel, the good tidings of peace and salvation, is commanded to be preached in all the world *to every creature*. (Mark, xvi. 15.)

The fact therefore is too notorious to be denied by any sober man; the greatest difficulty has been to account for so universal a pravity. If all men sin, under all circumstances and dispensations, there seems to be some original fault in our constitution, some unconquerable bias infused into it, which brings us under a necessity; and this removes the fault from our own wills, and transfers it to the Author of our nature. And indeed some original fault we must be obliged to acknowledge, not only from the above consideration, but also from the complaint of the Psalmist, that *he was shapen*, or brought forth, *in iniquity, and in sin did his mother conceive him*. (Ps. li. 5.) And that of upright Job, comparatively so at least; yet even he says, that no one was free from corruption, no though his life was but a day long: agreeable hereto we find the philosophers lamenting an inborn implanted principle of sin. Both Jews and Pagans used to offer sacrifice, and expiate the mother and the infant: and our Saviour informs us that the natural birth itself excludes us from heaven; that what is so born is flesh, which must be born again of the spirit before it enters there. (John, iii. 5.) Whence it appears that we are born sinners, and infants must be accounted such, otherwise they have no claim to salvation through Christ. But will not this make God, the Author of our nature, the author also of sin? God forbid we should entertain so blasphemous a suggestion, which Christians and Heathens have jointly agreed to reject! though their accounts of it otherwise have been not a little wild and perplexed. However, as a knowledge of the disease is necessary to shew the aptness of the remedy, I shall with all humility enquire how this corruption is propagated, and how cleansed by the operations of the Holy Ghost.

In order hereto I find it will be convenient to take notice of two very remarkable and different accounts given of it in the third century of Christianity.

The one was Origen's, who supposed the present bias towards evil proceeded from ill habits contracted by the soul in a pre-

pre-existence created freedom of will, both in the body, and in the soul. That the degrees of liberty who have of liberty those who of the again; selves for their father. Origen out his was a pre-therfore scriptur cannot build f to the among There some wills, fake thereb tual d for wh dies o chanic they l transmi ed th their ritual their f doctri others Th much pagate taught light, God; of evil one o these, the o which make substantia ruptio from ceede thing

pre-existing state, where they had been created from eternity with an absolute freedom of will; but for their bad elections were encrusted with gross terrestrial bodies, and turned down into this world both for their punishment and their cure. That they undergo several changes and degrees of perfection and misery. Those who had once been angels, from an abuse of liberty were now become men, and those who now are men, by a right use of their liberty would become angels again; and that the very devils themselves should at length find a revolution in their favour. If we would know whence Origen drew his opinions, we must find out his school; his master Ammonius was a philosophical Christian; the disciple therefore derived his instructions from the scriptures and philosophy. And as we cannot find any foundation in scripture to build such tenets upon, we must trace up to the other source, and look for them among the writings of his favourite Plato. There we read of souls attending Jupiter; some of which by the pravity of their wills, which he calls their charioteer, forsake the contemplation of truth, and thereby lose their wings, or those spiritual desires which lift them up to heaven; for which they are thrust into suitable bodies of philosophers, kings, artists, mechanics, and husbandmen; in which if they behave well, they obtain a better transmigration; if ill, a worse; till purged through different states, at length their wings grow again, *i. e.* their spiritual desires revive, and they revert to their first condition in heaven. And this doctrine of transmigration, with many others, Plato received from Pythagoras.

The other opinion which obtained much more in the same century was propagated by that arch heretic Manes: he taught two eternal principles; one was light, the author of good, and this was God; the other was darkness, the author of evil, and that was matter; that every one of us receives a soul from each of these, the one of which is a part of God, the other a part of the evil principle, which enters into our constitution and makes a part of it; that this was an evil substance, and the cause of natural corruption. And as necessity is inseparable from matter, from this evil principle proceeded a necessity of sinning; and that all things are done by fate, according to the

eternal predestination of God with respect to these two contrary principles. These, or such like opinions were indeed espoused by elder heretics in the church, such as Cerdon, Marcion, and some others; but Manes seems rather to have succeeded to them as a Persian, and heir to the doctrines and books of his master Terebinthus, deriving them from Zoroaster the contemporary and probably the acquaintance of Pythagoras. Contrary as these opinions look, it would be no great difficulty so far to reconcile them as to shew, with no little probability, that they both derived from the same tradition, which was divided amongst them and corrupted. Notions of this evil principle we meet with among all nations, so widely scattered from one another, that they must have received it from some very ancient doctrine: the Jews, the Egyptians, the Brachmans, the Chinese, the Peruvians discover it; but these all suppose him to have been created, and the Persians in particular shew how they came by this opinion, calling him expressly by the name of Satan. These considering that angel only after his fall, and from a tradition of the temptation in paradise, fancied sin proceeded from the overpowerful influences of an evil principle; but the Grecian philosophers caught the other part of that angel's history, who fell from heaven by an abuse of his free-will, whence they taught that the will was free to good or evil, though both acknowledged that our immersion in matter lays a bias upon it to the last.

The unhappy encrease and consequence of the Manichæan doctrines in the end of the third century, indulging men in their vices by throwing the blame on an evil nature and necessity of sinning, made Pelagius in the beginning of the 4th, a man eminent for his piety in the Christian church, endeavour to awaken men from this indolent giving way to vice, by magnifying the powers of nature and free-will, of which the Manichees had spoken too unworthily; and taught a freedom of will in all men to good or ill, without the assistance of grace; though he acknowledged that the flesh gives a propensity to ill, and that therefore the divine assistance was desirable to facilitate our choice of virtue. This was agreeable to the Platonic opinion before mentioned, a little new dressed and altered by Origen and his

disciples. But it was contrary to scripture, which teaches us, that it is God, and not nature, that worketh in us both to *will* and to *do* (Phil. ii. 13.); that without Christ we can do nothing (1 John, xv. 5.); and therefore exhorts us, not only to *watch* according to our own powers, but also to *pray* (Matth. xxvi. 41.) for farther help, that we *enter not into temptation*: and as it is quite subversive of the doctrine of grace, was warmly opposed by St. Augustin before the middle of that century. His abhorrence of Pelagianism might perhaps make him fly too far towards the other extreme, to which when young he had been addicted; however some of his incautious followers have certainly too much inclined to Manichæism. Some dregs of which appear, not only in the Fomes Peccati of the Mahometans, which locally descended to them from the instructors of Manes who were Saracens; but also in the corrupted substance which the Zuinglians made original sin to be, and in the transformation of our natures into devils; being half devils and half beasts, as if our souls were emanations of the bad principle, imprisoned in bodies which we have in common with the brutes; in the doctrine of a necessity of sinning in consequence of God's predestination; and some others, which are originally Manichæism strained through the less guarded passages of St. Augustin.

I thought it convenient to take notice of these two very different accounts, and trace them up to their originals, 1. That I might remove out of the Christian church some strange doctrines which we find taught in it, and restore them to their true owners. 2. To observe that this universal corruption is assented to by men of all complexions, remote from one another both in sentiment and situation as east is from the west; the darkness of Paganism would not cover this truth, and heresy felt it in its own perverseness; no air or clime could heal the disease; fled men to China or Peru, the wound went with them. So that we must deduce it from the same common source that we derive our natures from, which is, the first parents of human kind. A third use which I would make of this view is, to be a check upon our judgments, that, since the extremes of free-will and necessary evil have introduced many errors in-

to the Christian church, we be upon our guard, lest the authority of names, and veneration of persons, mislead us contrary to the scriptures. Let not the unblameable beginning of Pelagius his life seduce us into a vain confidence of our own strength, that we can do without Christ, to the overthrow of grace; nor the sanctity of that great light and champion of Christianity St. Augustin, who found cause to retract many things which his zeal had dropped, persuade us to leave off *working out our own salvation* (Phil. ii. 12.), from misinterpreted notions of God's decrees, and irresistible grace. I know no better guide to conduct us through this intricate question than that father himself is: he tells us, the true Christian "so asserts free-will as to impute the origin of sin, both in angels and men, to an abuse of that, and not to a nature essentially evil of which we have no account; this utterly destroys Manichæism; at the same time, that the will, since captivated, cannot recover its liberty again but by the grace of God; which destroys the heresy of Pelagius."

This is the true state of the case according to the scriptures: they will guard us against the two dangerous extremes of an arrogant merit to which we have no claim; and the indolent excuse of fate and necessity for which we have no grounds. If we examine those sacred records, they will inform us, that *God created man in his own image* (Gen. i. 27.); which Solomon explains, when he says, that God hath *made man upright* (Eccles. vii. 31.); able to weigh things with an equal balance, which had no light end to kick at spiritual good for want of knowledge, nor necessarily weighed down to earthly things from the overpoise of affections. An attribute ascribed to God by the prophet, *thou upright, dost weigh the path of the just*. (Isaiah, xxvi. 7.) Whence the book of Wisdom observes, that God *made man the image of his own propriety*; and so long as no perverse choice made him decline from this original uprightness, he had great variety of enjoyments prepared for him in Paradise, with privilege to eat of the tree of life, by which means he might live for ever. Thus man was created in incorruption, and his righteousness, had he continued in it, would have made him immortal. The knowledge of spiritual good,

good, without which the will could not have been free, or have power to choose it, was not essential, but supernaturally vouchsafed by immediate revelations from God, and communication with him: immortality was not necessary to his nature, but the additional gift and reward of his Creator, to be acquired by the use of means.

We are afterwards informed, that by the suggestions of the serpent, which the envy of the devil employed, (one of those *angels who sinned and kept not their first estate* (2 Pet. ii. 4. Jud. 6.) or dignity, but deserted their own habitation; fragments of which tradition we before observed among the philosophers; through his suggestions, I say, we are informed that) our first parents were prevailed upon to make a wrong election, choosing to indulge appetite, and the senses, rather than believe or regard the commands and information of heaven, by one obstinate act renouncing the divine assistance, and defying the mortality which God had threatened. The soul, which before was enlightened by the perpetual presence of God in it, after this voluntary departing from it was confounded in the darkness of its own natural faculties: all the knowledge he attained, was the comfortless experience of a benighted traveller; he knew his sun was set, and that his own eyes would no longer serve him to escape precipices; they were indeed open, but discerned only the want of the divine light and protection: they could discover no traces to lead him *where the light dwelleth* (Job, xxxviii. 12. 19.), nor was it in his power to *command the morning*, and call forth the day-star to rise in his heart again. Nor was this all his misery; for the consciousness of his guilt introduced disordered passions into his soul, such as shame, fear, remorse, irregular appetites, and aversion from God. *They made themselves aprons; they were afraid; and hid themselves* (Gen. iii. 7, 8. 10.) from the presence of God. Thus his freedom of will was weakened towards spiritual good, by the want of that supernatural knowledge which made it a poize against carnal things; and at the same time inclined to evil by the inlet and torrent of irregular passions. The consequence of this loss of righteousness, was loss of happiness: man thus disordered, and averse from God, could not but be miserable. His Maker

therefore in justice deprived him of those blessings in Paradise which were the entertainment of his innocence, and not without a mixture of pity too, excluded him from the opportunity of reaching to the tree of life, lest he should *eat and live for ever* (Gen. iii. 22.); and so immortalize a sinful and miserable being. Thus was he left to his own blind conduct and the sweat of his brow for a subsistence; subject to the calamities of his own diseased affections, and the tumultuous behaviour of his posterity born in the same condition, till the decays of nature or wore or broke the springs of life, crumbling his body into original earth, and dismissing the soul, polluted with many habits of sin, and for ever deprived of its body, which was once designed its comfort and instrument of happiness, to spend its future existence in the remorse of past guilt, and a view of the ruin wilfully brought upon itself and human nature. The departure of the spirit of God from the soul, was the death of it. So Adam died in the day that he eat of the forbidden tree. The troubles and afflictions, which necessarily attended his deserted state, were the first scenes that opened upon him in this new region of death, the beginnings of his punishment;

—*Primis in faucibus orci
Luctus & ultrices posuere cubilia curæ. Virg.*

The dissolution of the body was but a single arrow from the loaded quiver of this king of terrors, and the natural consequence of being driven from the tree of life. The sorrowful widowhood of the soul, afterwards through ages of hopeless end, all together make that eternal death which *dying* he was to *die*. (Gen. ii. 17.)

Such was Adam's sin, and such his punishment: the important question follows; How far are we concerned in either?

Adam for his sin was driven out of Paradise; and it is certain that his posterity were driven out with him: labour and weariness were appointed to him; and we feel that the curse descends to those sprung from him: he became subject to diseases and death, I mean that which respects the dissolution of soul and body; and experience convinces us that he has left this unhappy inheritance to his children. And as all these were but the con-

sequential punishment of that spiritual death which Adam died, in losing the divine assistance and support of God's holy spirit which he voluntarily renounced and forfeited; so the like appearances of sickness and decay in us, are a manifest proof, that where the root is cut off from the waters and receives no nourishment, the *dew* (Job, xxix. 19.) of heaven will not rest upon the branches to give them life and verdure. These were inflicted upon him as a punishment of his disobedience; in which punishment we are involved, without any personal guilt of our own; we therefore are sufferers on the account of Adam's sin, and are treated in the same manner that he was, whose actual guilt alone it was: forsaken of God; void of supernatural knowledge; strangers to, and averse from spiritual good; and immersed in the affections of a sensual life.

But there is a passage in the third of Genesis which seems to represent the consequences of eating of the forbidden fruit more like the glorious effects which the serpent promised: *And the Lord God said, behold the man is become as one of us, to know good and evil.* (Gen. iii. 22.)

Then was the devil no liar, and the throwing Adam, because thus improved, out of Paradise (as the following words sound) casts a reflection on the divine philanthropy. To avoid this sense of the words, many of the fathers, and I think the general stream of interpreters, suppose them a sarcasm used by God, as a kind of triumph over man's mistake and misery. But a still less harsh explication may be given, quite consistent with the words, and more agreeable to the tenor of scripture.

Maimonides observes that the tree is not said to be of the knowledge of true and false, which are the objects of the understanding; but of good and evil, not moral but natural, things pleasant and disagreeable to the sensual appetites. While Adam continued innocent, and followed the dictates of the divine reason, such objects made but transient and secondary impressions upon him; but when he renounced that guidance, and preferred sensual delights and entertainments, instead of spiritual truths, the mind was taken up with the apprehension of sensible objects, and given up to earthly and vile affections. This, according to that

learned Jew, was the knowledge of good and evil. But if so, how could God say, *Behold the man is become like one of us?* What we translate *of us*, may be singular in the original, and is so rendered by Onkelos, *ex eo*. If therefore Adam אדם be taken collectively for human kind, as it frequently is when א is prefixed, as it is here, the sense of the passage will be this; Behold, all mankind issuing from this stock is as one, left to the guidance of sensual appetites; and therefore that they might not immortalize a miserable being, God excluded him, and them in him, from the privilege of eating of the tree of life. This represents God more like himself, mixing mercy with justice, and not triumphing over fallen man: this represents us, as we find ourselves, carnal, earthly, animal, a kind of reasoning brutes, entangled and entertained with sensible objects, and subject to the infirmities, wants, decays, and miseries which our own blindness and perverseness, and that of others like ourselves, expose us to. This leaves room (what many moderns are so solicitous about) for a Tully to shine in the knowledge of social duties resulting from natural and civil relations; and for a Newton's genius to exercise itself in observations upon nature as high as telescopes can reach, or low as microscopes descend. They may excel in degrees of the knowledge of such good and evil; but if they have no principles of farther knowledge, what furniture or felicity will this be to them, when *all these things shall be dissolved* (2 Pet. iii. 11.), when relations cease, and nature fails?

This interpretation harmonizes with the sacred writings in other places. St. Paul tells us, that *through the offence of one, judgment passed upon all men to condemnation* (Rom. v. 18.); that *by one man's disobedience many were made sinners* (Rom. v. 19.); *through the offence of one, many be dead* (Rom. v. 15.), or *that in Adam all die.* (1 Cor. xv. 22.) Wherefore we (who are but the unfoldings and continuation of Adam) are counted or dealt with as sinners on the score of his actual guilt, and evidently share in the punishment which was inflicted on it. Thus Adam's sin is imputed to us, or reckoned and placed to our account, so far as to involve us in the sentence passed upon him. Thus *infirmity was made per-*
manent

manent with the malignity of the root. (Esd. iv. 22.) And because Adam transgressed, death was appointed in him, and in his generations, of whom came nations, tribes, people and kindreds out of number. (Esd. iv. 7.)

But a late celebrated writer informs us, that "to affirm that the first actual sin of Adam was imputed to all mankind as well as to him, is to affirm what the scripture does not teach. And if to impute to other persons the actual sin of one, be to account it theirs as well as his, it is evident this is impossible with God, who cannot account sin or any thing else to be what it is not." (Clark's xviii. Ser. p. 303, 304.) An appetite to the tree of knowledge, and a degree to be wise in contempt of God's word, is the actual guilt of many of Adam's sons as well as of Adam. If God cannot account to some persons the actual sin of another, then can he not do what he has threatened, *visit the iniquities of the fathers upon the children* (Exod. xx. 5.); then could he not command, what we find recorded as his command. (Deut. xiii. 14, 15.) That if any city prove idolaters the inhabitants should be destroyed utterly, and all that was therein. Fathers, children, grand-children, great grand-children, and the new-born children (as Maimonides expounds it) were all killed for the sin of their parents. Then again on Christ was not *laid the iniquity of us all* (Is. liii. 6.), we therefore must for ever bear our own actual sins. And if it be impossible for God to account sin to be what it is not, it is equally impossible with him to account it not to be what it is; wherefore the *word of reconciliation* (2 Cor. v. 19.) must seem an idle tale, since God cannot but impute our trespasses unto us. But if to account as ours, the actual sin of another, be so to place it to our account, as to involve us in the punishment inflicted upon, or due to that other; then, as Christ bore our sins upon the tree (1 Pet. ii. 24.); so to us may be imputed the transgression of Adam. And this the scripture does teach, when it informs us, that we are *made sinners by his disobedience*; and that *all die in him*. Truths which this writer could not but acknowledge, which he does in the next paragraph, where he tells us, that "the consequences of thus introducing sin into the world (by Adam) common with him and

his posterity are, mortality, exclusion out of Paradise, the miseries of the present life, and a greater liableness and stronger temptation to sin in their corrupt affections." These he says are the natural and necessary consequences of "his losing those free gifts and favours of God, which neither we nor he ever had any claim of right to enjoy." Yet as it is a loss to us of free gifts and favours which we are deprived of only for Adam's guilt, it is plain that his guilt is so far placed to our account, and imputed to us in punishment.

But we are not only made sinners by imputation, but become such, secondly, in consequence of the spirit of God receding from the soul, whereby we lose that divine image in which we were created, and are sunk in the darkness and ignorance of our own unassisted natural faculties. Adam was absolutely free to good as well as evil, but lost the principle of free-will by his distorted and perverse application of it; for the heavenly light withdrawn, left him and his posterity incapable of loving spiritual good, of which they were ignorant, by their estrangement from God, and the want of his gracious communications. *Having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God, through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their hearts.* (Eph. iv. 18.) Nor were they only thus negatively bad; but thirdly, positively so, by having their affections determined to carnal things from the perpetual presence of those things, and the appearance of good which they exhibited to the senses, which work in them a disinclination and aversion to any attempt that is made to draw them off from their beloved engagements and deceits. This is the old man, our original human nature, which the Apostle tells us is corrupt *through the deceitful lusts* (Eph. iv. 22.) *κατὰ τὰς ἐπιθυμίας ἀνάτης*, appetites the consequence of error. This is the *φρόνημα σαρκὸς*, the disposition, wisdom or affection of the flesh, which hangs a bias on the will, and is the distortion and depravation of it. This concupiscence is the principle of actual sin in us, and as it would (if we are not assisted by the grace of God) be infallibly the parent of it, it has in itself the nature of sin, and casts us out of the favour of God. *They that are in the flesh cannot please God* (Rom. viii.

8.), for its affection is *enmity against him*; it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be. (Rom. viii. 7.) And as thus by one man sin entered into the world, so

II. Also death by sin; as an alienation from God is a state of sin, so a state of sin is a state of death; wherefore the Gentiles are described as *dead in trespasses and sins*. (Eph. ii. 1.) The dissolution of soul and body follows as *the wages of sin* (Rom. vi. 23.), through which the body dies, which is the first death, while the soul in its perpetual exile shall suffer a *second death* (Rev. xx. 6.), burning in the flames of unsatisfied appetites which shall not be quenched, and suffering from the consciousness and remorse of past guilt, which shall never die.

Such is our fatal inheritance from Adam, affording abundant occasion for the divine philanthropy, to which not our merit, but our misery recommends us; and the salvation effected for us by the renewing of the Holy Ghost, is represented in the scriptures as corresponding to every part of our ruin, as an instance of grace, and to which we had no claim by nature.

If our old man be corrupt, through the loss of the divine image and similitude, by which our understandings are darkened, and our wills perverted, by this we are *renewed again in knowledge after the image of him who created us* (Col. iii. 10.), which is called our *new man, created after God, in righteousness and true holiness*. (Eph. iv. 24.)

If the *φρόνημα σαρκός* or natural concupiscence hangs a weight on our affections, and inclines them to earth, the *φρόνημα πνεύματος* or spiritual desires, is a balance against the carnal mind, and restores the will to its freedom, which is the *glorious liberty of the sons of God*. (Rom. viii. 5. 21.)

If the same natural concupiscence leads us to the commission of actual sins, and creates an enmity betwixt God and us (Rom. viii. 7.); our Saviour takes upon himself the sins of those to whom he sends the spirit of adoption (Rom. viii. 15. 32. 34.), to assure them of the love (Joh. iii. 16.), and ingraft them into the family of God (Joh. i. 12.), and to seal them to the day of redemption. (Eph. iv. 30.)

Lastly, if this carnal mind be a princi-

ple of death in us, of a spiritual, a temporal, and an eternal death, the spirit is in us a principle of life and peace, (Rom. viii. 6.) *quickening those who were dead in their sins by having forgiven them all trespasses*. (Col. ii. 13.) The dissolution of soul and body is no more a death but sleep (1 Cor. xv. 20. 2 Theff. iv. 13, 14, 15.), a rest from labour (Rev. xiv. 13.), a returning home from exile (2 Cor. v. 8.), a passage to a blessed immortality. (Joh. v. 24.) *The spirit which raised up Jesus from the dead, shall also quicken our mortal bodies* (Rom. viii. 11.), and raise our corruptible in incorruption (1 Cor. xv. 42.), where our *mortality shall be swallowed up of life*. (2 Cor. v. 4.) A life more lasting and more glorious than this which is measured and influenced by suns and moons, *for the glory of God will lighten it, and the Lamb will be the light thereof* (Rev. xxi. 23.); where we shall reign for ever and ever, and receive from the Spirit the consummation of that bliss of which he is here the earnest.

As this account of the need and necessity of receiving the Holy Ghost in his enlightening, sanctifying, and quickening graces, is drawn from the sacred scriptures; so is it the genuine doctrine of the church of England, as may be seen not only in her articles of original sin, free-will, and justification; but also in her first rudiments laid down by Archbishop Cranmer and the rest of the committee of divines, in their treatise called a "Necessary Erudition for a Christian Man." Where we are thus instructed: "The state and condition of free-will was otherwise in our first parents before they had sinned, than it was either in them or their posterity after they had sinned; for our first parents, Adam and Eve, until they wounded and overthrew themselves by sin, had so in possession the power of free-will by the most liberal gift and grace of God their Maker, that not only they might eschew all manner of sin, but also know God, and love him, and fulfil all things appertaining to their supreme felicity. For they were created in a state of righteousness, and after the image and similitude of God, having power of free-will to obey or disobey. So that by obedience they might live, and by disobedience they should worthily deserve to die. From this most happy state, our first parents falling by disobedience, most grievously

ously hurt themselves and their posterity : for besides many other evils that came by that transgression, the high power of man's reason and freedom of will were wounded and corrupted ; and all men thereby brought into such blindness and infirmity, that they cannot eschew sin, except they be illuminated, and made free, by an especial grace, that is to say, by a supernatural help, and working of the Holy Ghost. Although there remains a certain freedom of will in those things which do pertain to the desires and works of this present life, yet to perform spiritual and heavenly things, free-will of itself is insufficient. And therefore the power of man's free-will being thus wounded and decayed, hath need of a physician to heal it, and an help to repair it, that it may receive light and strength, whereby it may see, and have power to do those godly and spiritual things, which before the fall of Adam, it was able and might have done."

I should now proceed to consider the means of receiving these graces ; but before I do so, it will be necessary to examine some doctrines, which, if true, will make those means so arbitrary, as to take away all encouragement and invitation to seek after them. This I propose to do (God willing) the next opportunity.

S E R M O N XXI.

The Means of Grace.

TITUS, iii. 4, 5, 6, 7.

But after that the kindness and love of God our Saviour toward man appeared,
Not by works of righteousness, which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost ;
Which he shed on us abundantly, through Jesus Christ our Saviour :
That being justified by his grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life.

HAVING shewn that the occasion or want of grace is as universal as human nature ; and that God's will and desire to save is represented as reaching to all men, I endeavoured to answer some objections drawn from the doctrine of election and reprobation, with regard to particular persons to whom the gospel is

preached ; and then with regard to whole nations from whom that light is at present withheld : I afterwards entered upon the consideration of the strongest argument against universal grace, I mean the supposed want of it for 4000 years, from the fall of Adam to the ascension of Christ ; where having shewn, that there was grace in various measures dispensed under the several dispensations before the law, under the law, and without the law, I proposed to remark more distinctly to what purposes the grace then dispensed was effectual, and what the disadvantages of those dispensations were, compared with that of the gospel ; previous to my fourth and last enquiry, viz. into the means of that grace shed abundantly on us through Jesus Christ.

Under each of those states there was, by means of divine communications either immediate or remote, grace dispensed sufficient for the attaining a love of God ; a knowledge of religious and social duties ; a withdrawing the affections from the world ; and a faith in the promises of good things beyond this life.

1. A love of God : Thus Enoch had a testimony that *he pleased God* (Heb. xi. 5.) ; and Noah *was found perfect and righteous* (Ecclus. xlv. 17.) ; Job *was upright, and feared God* (Job, i. 1.) ; and David's soul panted after him, loving *nothing in comparison of him*. (Psal. lxxiii. 24.) The Gentile philosophy would supply us with many specimens of their exalted notions on this head, though the true object of worship was mistaken or unknown. The prayers, alms, and fasts of Cornelius (Acts, x. 4.) ; and the many devout worshippers among the Greeks (Acts, xvii. 4.), recorded in the New Testament, are more perfect instances of this love, even to the true God, the God of Israel.

2. The knowledge of religious and social duties was revealed to the antediluvian world, by which they were *convinced of their ungodly deeds, which they ungodly committed*. (Jude, 15.) These were handed down to the postdiluvians by Noah, and were called his precepts by his sons, who carried with them into all the regions of the new world the great lines of religion and morality. This was the law of the Most High which Abraham kept ; which restrained Abimelech ; which made Joseph dread to sin

against God; and taught upright Job to eschew evil. But as this law was corrupted or obliterated, and in danger of being totally lost, God was pleased to republish it by Moses; while the broken fragments of it only were left to the rest of the world, which the legislators and philosophers have industriously sought after, and wove among their own systems of law and ethics. Their own reasonings and observations upon the fitness and beauty of those rules, which made them approve them, and give a sanction to them, where their divine authority was unknown; and their proper application and unfolding them in particular cases, was what St. Paul calls *the work of the law written in their hearts*. (Rom. ii. 15.) A third operation of the Holy Ghost in those days was a power in men to withdraw their affection from the world. Thus Moses chose rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt. (Heb. xi. 25, 26.) Nay the time would fail, says the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews, to tell of those before the coming of Christ who were stoned, were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword; who wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented; who were tortured, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection. (Ibid. 32, 35, 36, 37.) The Pagan moralists are full of these sentiments in their writings, and not entirely destitute of examples in their practice.

The fourth effect and sign of the Spirit of God in those early times, was a faith in the promises of good things beyond this life. By this, Abel offered a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain; and Noah became heir of the righteousness which is by faith: by this, Abraham was justified, and thousands of his descendants died in full expectation of future good things. Among the Gentiles, besides those whose actions were in some degree influenced by the hopes of rewards and happiness hereafter, many we read of who renounced the world, gave in their names as worshippers of the God of Israel, in confidence of his favour in another world, becoming therefore his servants and soldiers, enlisted as St. Luke expresses it *τεταγμένοι*, or as we render

it, *ordained to eternal life*. (Acts, xiii. 48.)

The principal disadvantages of their state in comparison of those under the gospel, were, that when they knew and felt their corruption, they were strangers to the cure of it: St. Paul breathes out the melancholy sigh of men in that state when he cries, *O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of death!* But the Christian gives thanks to God for his redemption through Jesus Christ our Lord. (Rom. vii. 24, 25.) It is true the others were acquainted with rules to direct them, and believed that a behaviour conformable thereto would make them like God and happy; but the more light they had given them to discern their duty, the more heinous and dangerous their offences appeared, so that *the commandment which was ordained to life they found to be unto death*. (Rom. vii. 10.) But we know that Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us (Gal. iii. 13.); blotting out the hand-writing of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross. (Colos. ii. 14.) They had indeed an indistinct faith that God would be favourable to them in another world, but whether he would entirely pardon their sins for which their consciences reproached them, or in what manner or measure he would punish them, they knew nothing of. But now not only a total remission of sins is preached by the word of reconciliation, but *life and immortality is also brought to light through the gospel*. (2 Tim. i. 10.)

With regard to their final condition, it may be farther asked, whether the grace vouchsafed before the incarnation was sufficient to save those to whom it was given? If it was, what more can be obtained by Christians? If not, how does that deserve the name grace, which served not to benefit, but perplex and disturb mankind? And here not charity only will lead us to hope, but truth oblige us to believe, that the ages before Christ came in the flesh had grace sufficient vouchsafed them by which they might be saved. For Christ who was sacrificed for us was *the lamb slain before the foundation of the world* (Rev. xiii. 8.), for the redemption of the transgressions that were under the first testament. (Heb. ix.

15.) If no grace or favour was dispensed to them, but they all stand condemned in Adam's sentence, there seems no room left for another tribunal, to judge those whose consciences accuse or excuse them both in the law, and without the law, which yet, according to St. Paul's gospel, will be done *in the day when God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ.* (Rom. ii. 12. 16.) In which judgment the Ninevites who repented at the preaching of Jonah, *i. e.* under fewer means of grace, shall condemn the obstinacy of such as would not repent under greater, after the coming of Christ. Nay, we have our Saviour's word for it, that *Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob shall sit down in the kingdom of God.* (Matt. viii. 11.) Nor is this salvation confined to Jews only, as an exclusive privilege because God loved Jacob; for Esau whom he hated, as has been before observed, is not supposed to be finally lost or reprobated. Among his posterity, and out of the Jewish church, was holy Job, of whose salvation I think neither Jew or Christian ever doubted, who allowed him any existence. The Jewish doctors granted a place in the life to come to their proselytes of the gate, the devout Gentiles, who observed the moral law, not from a philosophical opinion of its beauty and fitness, but from a religious sense of its divine obligation, and from a love and dread of the Sacred Imposer. Of this number, among others, was Candace's eunuch (Acts, viii. 27.), and Cornelius the centurion (Acts, x. 1.), and other *devout Greeks a great multitude.* (Acts, xvii. 4.) A due use of their few talents recommended them to the trust of more from the preaching of the gospel; but such as behaved like them before Christ's ministry, cannot be supposed totally out of the reach of God's merciful acceptance. Not but that there will doubtless be a great difference betwixt them in their degrees of happiness; else there had been but little use in the ministry of Philip to the eunuch, or of St. Peter to Cornelius, or of Christ and his Apostles to the true Israelites and devout Greeks. And if the fewer allotments of grace will abate the number of stripes (Luk. xii. 48.) to those who transgress, we must with great justice suppose, that they will also make an abatement in glory to those who have

used them worthily. The five talents of the Christians, well managed, procure for them the presidency over five cities; the two talents of the Jews will enable them to obtain two cities, though no more; and even the one talent of the Gentiles, if it had not been buried in the earth, but had been properly improved, would have recommended them to still farther means of grace, through an acquaintance with the living oracles deposited in the keeping of the Jews, which was vouchsafed to some, by which means they would also have received though not an equal reward with those who were more favoured, yet a proportionable one. (Matt. xxv. 14, &c.) The earthly Jerusalem is represented as a type of *that which is above*; and *the tabernacle as the pattern of heavenly things.* (Heb. viii. 5.) In which view the author of Ep. Hebr. observes many particulars, which seem to cast light upon this point. There was the court of the Gentiles, and others still nearer and nearer to the Divine Majesty for the Israelites and priests; but neither of these had permission to enter into the Sanctum sanctorum: *the Holy Ghost thus signifying, that the way into the holiest of all was not yet made manifest, while as the first tabernacle was yet standing, which was a figure for the time then present.* (Heb. ix. 8, 9.) *But God has prepared some better things for us: wherefore we, brethren, have boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus.* (Heb. x. 19.)

Nor was this all; for as the happiness was less, so the number of those who attained to it before the gospel dispensation, was probably much less than of those since the incarnation. But this, not because sufficient grace was denied, but because they resisted it, the generality of the old world brought the deluge upon it: however, this is no proof that the Spirit was not yet, for the Spirit strove to correct the imaginations of their hearts. (Gen. vi. 3, 5.)

If a very inconsiderable number of the Jews are sealed (Rev. vii. 4.), St. Stephen gives us the reason, not because there was no grace under that æconomy, but because they were uncomplying with it, *stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, they and their fathers always resisting the Holy Ghost.* (Acts, vii. 51.) And with regard to the Gentiles, St.

Paul

Paul tells us, that *when they knew God, they worshipped him not as God, neither were thankful: wherefore even as they liked not to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind.* (Rom. i. 28.)

But though all these had light sufficient to have led them to some degrees of happiness in another life, and their voluntary departure from it will justly subject them to punishment; yet their want of that abundance which God undeservedly has afforded us, shall make it *more tolerable even for Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment, than for us, if we neglect such great salvation.* (Heb. ii. 3.) The fear of greater punishment to those who reject greater grace, and the sure confidence of more abundant glory to those who have more abundant grace vouchsafed them here, should make us earnest to obtain the largest measures of it that we can, and diligent to improve what we do obtain. Which brings me to the last general head,

To enquire into the means by which the Holy Ghost is dispensed and shed abundantly upon us.

It is from the Giver only that we can know by what means he will please to dispense his gifts; and where he has appointed any, we may safely rely upon them, so as to expect grace by the due use of them, but can have no sure grounds to expect it from any other. For though God be not so tied to his own appointed means, as to restrain himself from bestowing grace by any other method if he pleases, yet his appointment lays a necessary obligation upon us to apply to it for such spiritual aids as he has promised to give thereby. Yet, though we are to apply ourselves to such means, and from them only can expect grace, we must not look upon them otherwise than as means, nor believe them to be, or themselves to give that grace of which they are no more than the channels. So that to neglect the means appointed by God, is either infidelity, in not believing them to be available for the end for which God has appointed them; or else, a great impiety, in contemning the grace thereby to be vouchsafed. To apply ourselves to other means than those appointed, is enthusiasm, as it dreams of divine communications from the impulse of our own imagina-

tions, without sufficient warrant from the ordinary revelation of scripture, or an extraordinary one duly attested. Or to reverence even the appointed means in such a manner as to look upon them as if they were what they convey, or that by their natural efficacy they produced those effects, of which by God's will only they are the moral instruments, is a superstitious opinion, and idolatrous veneration.

The great instituted mean is the gospel in general, as comprehending the divine truths inspired by the Holy Ghost, and written by the sacred penmen, together with those heavenly lessons written in the sacred character, God's own hieroglyphics, those *verba visibilia*, as St. Austin calls them, the sacraments, speaking to every man in his own tongue the wonderful dispensations of God. Of this gospel, comprehending as well the sacraments as the written word, are those characters to be understood, that *it is the power of God to salvation to every one that believeth* (Rom. i. 16.); *that it is an incorruptible seed by which we are born again.* (1 Pet. i. 23.)

But the spiritual man, like the natural, is to be considered in three states; 1. His conception, to which the written word does peculiarly conduce. 2. His new birth or regeneration, which is effected by baptism. And, 3. His growth and nourishment, which owes itself chiefly to the divine sustenance of the Lord's supper. Of which I shall treat in their order.

1. The written word: the great end of which is, to procure us the gift of faith, for *faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.* (Rom. x. 17.) When men had a full, though sorrowful knowledge of sin, and were sensible of the infirmity and misery of their condition, that they had greatly offended, and had just reason to dread punishment; (which were lessons which God taught them in the schools of the law and of philosophy, and lessons which had been so fully learned by the disciples under each, as was seen before, that both were convinced of their need of farther light and assistance:) when this fulness of time was come, when the Jews longed for a Redeemer, the Prophet that should tell them all things, and fled to Ænon confessing their sins, that they

they might escape the wrath to come (Joh. iii. 23. Matt. iii. 5, 6, 7.), which they deserved and feared; when philosophy had experienced its inability to reform mankind, and gave up the cause of virtue as hopeless and unattainable by their systems, and despaired of atonement from their custom of sacrifices, wishing for farther information from heaven; then Christ the blessing (Gen. xii. 3.), and the desire (Hag. ii. 7.) of all nations came, to make manifest the mystery which had been hid from ages and generations, the hope of glory. (Coloss. i. 26, 27.) When they found themselves stripped of their innocence, and half dead, and that the priest and the Levite would afford them no assistance, our Saviour came, like his own good Samaritan, to bind up their wounds, and pour in oil and wine.

But as the gospel succeeds into, so also it supplies the place of the law, whether as re-delivered to Moses, or gathered up by the philosophers, and supercedes not their use by making it unlawful to seek for any light there, it comes not to *destroy* (Matth. v. 17.), but to *fulfil*, or complete what was defective in them: it restores the spiritual meaning of the Mosaic statutes, which the Jewish interpreters had buried under their glosses; and gives a sanction and divine authority to the moral precepts, of which philosophy had lost the knowledge. So that the lowest of its praise is to surpass the highest excellencies of any preceding æconomy, to be a finer system of morality than any of the Gentiles could furnish out, and a clearer exposition and reading on the Jewish law than any of their Rabbi's have been able to make. To those who hear it, it better answers the very end at which they aimed, and for which they were designed, doctrine, conviction, correction, and instruction in righteousness. It therefore more effectually conveys the grace, in some measure, attainable under former dispensations, a conviction of our sins, and compunction for them. It is *sharper than the two-edged* (Heb. iv. 12.) instrument of the priest with which he dissected the sin-offering, piercing to the very inmost recesses, and lays open our most hidden blemishes and defects; till *pricked to the heart* from a sense of guilt, and of the Majesty offended by it, we cry out for help, *Men and brethren, what shall*

we do? (Acts, ii. 37.) But though the word be the same seed, and so equally good, yet cast into different soils, it has very different effects. Some, though their vices flash in their faces at hearing the word, and conscious guilt *cuts them to the heart*, yet instead of humbling, they harden themselves and *gnash* (Act. vii. 54.) upon the preacher *with their teeth*: instead of bewailing, defend or excuse their crimes: instead of fearing the punishment, make light of the threatening; and instead of reforming, add sin unto sin. Who, *when they hear the words of the curse, yet bless themselves in their heart, and say, I shall have peace, though I walk after the imagination of mine heart to add drunkenness to thirst.* (Deut. xxix. 19.) Others again, though brought to tremble when *reasoned with of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come*; yet, with Felix, divert the thoughts for the present, under pretence of waiting for *a more convenient season.* (Act. xxiv. 25.) If such are deprived of farther grace, they cannot charge God with unkindness: his Holy Spirit has stood at their doors, and knocked, and they refused to open unto him. But to those who have complied with this grace, by acknowledging and grieving for their offences, and flying to God for help, the word is an instrument of conveying more, by opening to them a clear and distinct hope of salvation.

And here begins the peculiar use and efficacy of the gospel: the thunders, and lightnings, and smoke of the mountain (Exod. xix. 16, 18.), which accompanied the law, vanish away and are heard no more; the terrors of the Divine Majesty soften into the affections of *our Father who is in heaven.* (Matth. vi. 9. See 2 Cor. iii. 7, 8, 9. 14. 18.) He is represented to us as *love* (1 Joh. iv. 8.) itself, as willing to be *reconciled* (2 Cor. v. 19, 20.), and *not impute our trespasses* unto us. That the guilty mind may bear up against the uneasy apprehensions of an angry God, from the repeated declarations of his kindness and philanthropy. (Joh. iii. 16. Tit. iii. 4.) The sufferings of the Son of God for our sins (1 Pet. ii. 21, 24.), the ransom of his blood (Act. xx. 28. Eph. i. 7. Col. i. 14. 1 Pet. i. 18, 19.), and the satisfaction thereby made for us (Rom. v. 9. Col. i. 20.), are perpetually inculcated, and in various methods, to discharge

discharge the conscious soul of its fears from the divine justice, that *all that labour and are heavy laden may have rest.* (Matth. xi. 28.) The fellowship and abiding of the Holy Spirit with us (2 Cor. xiii. 14. Phil. i. 2. Joh. xiv. 16.), to adopt us into the family of God (Rom. viii. 15. Gal. iv. 6.), and unite us unto him (Joh. xvii. 21. 23. 1 Joh. iii. 24.), who enables us to combat against nature (Rom. viii. 7. 9. Eph. ii. 2. 8.), and the prince of this world; to sow the seed and principle of eternal life in our hearts (Rom. viii. 10.); to triumph over death (Rom. viii. 11.), and seal us to the day of redemption (Eph. iv. 30.), are so frequently and affectionately promised, that the sense of our own weakness and mortality need no longer discourage us from entertaining *the hope of glory laid up in heaven for us, whereof we have heard in the word of the truth of the gospel.* (Col. i. 5.) This love of God, and grace of our Lord Jesus Christ through his salvation applied to us, and the fellowship of the Holy Ghost, are not the objects of our senses, and are proposed in the written word only as in our power to obtain; the natural man therefore who will believe nothing but his outward senses, can have no evidence of their truth, nor consequently entertain any hope of the promise; we may so engage and embarrass ourselves with things present, as to neglect or reject the revelation; or our prejudices and ignorance may so interpret it, as either to disbelieve the mercy offered, or despair of it; offending against stumbling-blocks of our own laying, or treating as foolishness whatever conclusions are drawn from premises of which our senses have no certain testimony. But through the prolific influences of the Holy Spirit accompanying the written word, by which it becomes the good seed sown, and without which it is but scattered chaff, it may take root in our hearts, producing that faith which gives substance to the things hoped for, and evidence to the things not seen. (Heb. xi. 1.) This gift is conveyed to us by the word; and where this gift is, it becomes the pledge, or rather earnest of the farther graces of the Holy Spirit, which the written word is also designed the instrument of deriving to us, and without which our faith shall not save

us; for *faith, if it have not works, is dead, being alone* (Jam. ii. 17.); and this gift is the grace of repentance, *a turning from Satan unto God.* (Act. xxvi. 18.)

The word, which gives us the knowledge of God's love to us, will also be a means of shedding abroad in our hearts, 1. A love towards him; *we shall love him, because he first loved us* (1 Joh. iv. 19.); and this love will be in us a principle, 2. Of obedience; encouraging us thereto, from an assurance of pardon for our past offences, the promises of aid and assistance beyond the power of our own nature, and the gracious acceptance of our sincere endeavours, though they reach not to a perfect service; *for this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments* (1 Joh. v. 3.) And this love of God engages us, 3. To a love of our brethren: not barely from civil virtue, the praise and beauty of humane actions, the fitness and benefit of social duties; but from the common interest and relation that we all bear to the same creator, who *has made of one blood all nations* (Acts, xvii. 26.); the common hope we all have in the same Redeemer, who *died for all* (2 Cor. v. 15.); and the communion of the same Spirit, which unites us to one head, and makes us one body. (Eph. ii. 18, 19, 20, 21, 22. iv. 15, 16. Col. ii. 19.) 4. The same word discovering to us the glories of another life, and the hindrance which this world is in our way to heaven (this world, of whose emptiness, trouble, vanity, and uncertainty long experience had before convinced us); this influences our affections, and draws them off from earth, and *sets them on things above.* (Rom. xii. 2. Col. iii. 2. 1 Joh. v. 4.)

These are the beginnings and rudiments of the new man, the conceptions of the Christian life: thus are we *begotten again through the gospel* (1 Cor. iv. 15. 1 Pet. i. 3.), which is *the incorruptible seed that liveth and abideth for ever.* (1 Pet. i. 23. 25.) But all this is yet short of regeneration; it is only a preparation to the new birth, which is the effect of baptism, when we are *born of water, and of the spirit*; and after which the same graces do shoot forth, and unfold themselves into farther degrees, and more perfect measures. But this will be observed more at large hereafter.

At

At present it will be proper to consider, that though the word be seed, from which these graces germinate and take root in the heart, yet is it but the channel by which the divine graces are conveyed thither. It has not power of itself to work in our understandings a faith in God, nor influence the will to a repentance from dead works, without the aid of the Holy Ghost. It is true there are some historical parts so properly attested, that the mere natural man may find reason to give his assent to the relation; but this is far from divine faith, which is totally exercised about good things not known, but hoped for only; and in believing truths future and out of sight (Heb. xi. 1.), of which we can have no sensible evidence. So again, some moral precepts there delivered may appear so suitable to the present state of things, and our civil and natural relations, that the carnal man may see their beauty and convenience, and act agreeably thereto; but the Christian conversion is the work of God, as it flows from a love of him, a sense of duty and gratitude to him, to the *forsaking fathers and mothers, houses and lands* (Matth. xix. 29.), *to the denying ourselves* (Matth. xvi. 24.), *keeping under the body* (1 Cor. ix. 27.), *rejoicing in afflictions* (Act. v. 14. Rom. v. 3. Phil. i. 29. Jam. i. 3.), throwing up every present good and grateful sensation for the hope of what *neither eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor can the heart of man conceive* (1 Cor. ii. 9.); things which *the natural man receiveth not, for they are foolishness unto him, neither*, though plainly proposed in the written word, *can he know them, for they are spiritually discerned.* (1 Cor. ii. 14.) Thus for instance, when the preacher opens his mouth, we may either indulge nature, by engaging ourselves in secular thoughts, and waste the information; a Felix dismisses Paul with a *Go thy way for this time* (Act. xxiv. 25.); and a Gallio careth for none of these things. (Act. xviii. 17.) Or we may, by grace, suspend this worldliness for a while, permit our hearts to be diverted to a new care, and *attend to the things spoken.* (Act. xvi. 14.) After we have given attendance, and have heard our Saviour, or his Apostles, instructing or directing us, we may, either by the aids of grace be of the number of those *blessed, who though they*

have not seen yet believe (Joh. xx. 29.); being convinced upon reasonable evidence that the revelation is from God; and then by a divine faith assenting to those truths, which our natural ideas are too short to reach; readily admitting, that if earthly things are too great for our comprehension, heavenly things (Joh. iii. 12.) must be more so: or, we may resist this grace, and make natural ideas the standard by which we weigh spiritual objects, properties, or relations, and so continue, or relapse into infidelity. The Spirit, that unites us to God, and adopts us into his family, may satisfy us of the possibility of being born again; though the carnal man may reject as absurd, that *a man that is old, should enter a second time into his mother's womb.* (Joh. iii. 4.) When we are told of a future eternity, we may scoff at the discovery, by giving way to our sensual appetites, and choose to *eat and drink, because tomorrow we die* (1 Cor. xv. 32. 35.); mocking at the doctrine of a resurrection with such obvious interrogations, *How are the dead raised up? And with what body do they come?* Others may receive the grace of God so far, as to suspend their contradiction, though not yet arrived at the gift of faith, and *desire to hear again of this matter.* (Act. xvii. 32.) And some, through illumination and sanctification of the Spirit, are persuaded that *whosoever liveth and believeth in the Son of God shall never die* (Joh. xi. 26, 27.); assured from a knowledge of the scriptures and the power of God (Matth. xxii. 29.), that *while we are present in the body we are absent from the Lord, desirous that this tabernacle may be dissolved* (2 Cor. v. 1—6.), despising the gratifications of sense, and the deceitful arguments it proposes (which others make their oracle and their deity), *groaning earnestly for their spiritual robes, that Christ would transform this vile body, and fashion it like unto his glorious body, according to that divine, though to us incomprehensible, energy, by which he is able even to subdue all things to himself.* (Phil. iii. 21.)

In like manner the precepts contained in the written word, require the operation of the Holy Ghost, to give them influence on the will and affections. Precepts which the carnal man rejects as unnatural, and therefore unreasonable

to his fleshly wisdom; but towards which the Spirit of holiness, if we will permit ourselves to be led by him, creates in us a new appetite and hunger, till it becomes *our very meat to do the will of God*. (Joh. iv. 34.) I might produce a great variety of instances, but I think enough has been said for my present purpose, which is to shew, that when the bare letter of the scripture is proposed, to the mere unassisted natural man, his understanding is too weak to apprehend many of its truths, his will and affections too blind and engaged to approve and follow its directions. It may indeed give them human evidence of historical truths, and philosophical arguments for social virtue; but the mystery of godliness, and evangelical purposes, is what we can never embrace, unless the Spirit give power to the letter to work a divine faith in us; without which, *the word preached profits not them that hear*. (Heb. ii. 4.) Our images, *the likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or in the earth beneath, or in the waters under the earth* (Exod. xx. 4.), can be no fit representatives of God, when grossly understood: our line cannot measure *the deep things of God*, neither can our shekels justly estimate *an eternal weight of glory*. Such points must indeed be foolishness to the natural man, *seeing, they see, but perceive not; and hearing, they hear, but do not understand*. (Mark, iv. 12.) The Spirit teaches us to discriminate (1 Cor. ii. 15.), and *reveals to babes*, to men of humble, teachable, unprejudiced hearts, things that are *hid from the wise and prudent*. (Matth. xi. 25.)

But though the word be only an instrument, of itself insufficient to illuminate or sanctify the hearer, for *faith is the gift of God* (Eph. ii. 8.); and he it is, *who worketh in us both to will and to do of his good pleasure* (Phil. ii. 13.); yet it is the instrument by God appointed for the conveyance of the beginnings and first motions of these graces in our hearts; and in the hands of God an instrument sufficient for the end designed. For *faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God* (Rom. x. 17.); where the written word is meant, for the Apostle refers to the prophets and the Gospel. And St. Peter informs us, that the gospel *preached* (1 Pet. i. 23. 25.) is the incorruptible seed, of which we are born again. We

are not therefore to expect or apply ourselves to dreams and visions, to receive from thence illapses of the Holy Spirit; for whatever extraordinary instances of this kind may happen (God being not tied, as was before observed, to ordinary means, though we are), yet these are not the common privileges of the gospel. Joel's prophecy, that it should *come to pass in the last days, that your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams* (Aet. ii. 17.), was, (as St. Peter informs us) fulfilled on that day of Pentecost, when about one hundred and twenty Galileans (on whom the Jews thought the spirit of prophecy never rested), men and women, young and old, saw the appearance of fiery tongues, and spoke as the Spirit gave them utterance. The Apostle proceeds to shew the accomplishment of the prophecy then, by characters which are not applicable to our days. The blessings of these times, is, as he tells us, that *whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved*. (Aet. ii. 21.) And when St. Paul preaches upon that text (Rom. x. 13, &c.), he informs us, that such calling is an effect of the word (not of dreams and visions), and that the word is dispensed by the preachers of the gospel, divinely commissioned (and not by angels or immediate revelations). It is hither our Saviour refers us; *They have Moses and the Prophets, let them hear them*. (Luk. xvi. 29.) And reprehends the fanciful expectations of supernatural evidence, by declaring that it would have no more efficacy (if granted) than that ordinarily appointed mean the written word, *If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded although one rose from the dead*. (Luk. xvi. 31.) And though the angels may have their charge over us, yet their commission is not to prevent, but forward the ministry of the word. The angel that was sent to Cornelius declared not the Gospel, nor dispensed the Spirit; but directs him only to whom he should go, *to hear words of him; and while Peter spake, the Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the word*. (Acts, x. 6. 22. 44.)

The word then being the instrument by which God conveys the beginnings and principles of faith and Christian life to us, it is our duty to attend to that for it, and not lay it aside, or discredit it as the

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letter and element only : let us not say with Hosius the Polish bishop, ' We have bid adieu to the scriptures, having seen so many, not only different but contrary interpretations given of them ; let us then rather hear God himself speak, than apply ourselves and trust our salvation to these jejune elements : there is no need (as he proceeds) of being skilful in the law and scriptures, but of being taught by God ; that labour is ill employed (says he) that is bestowed on the scriptures, for the scripture is a creature, and a poor kind of element.' Thus let papists resolve the truth of God into their pope's infallibility ; and let enthusiasts, if they please, lick up their filthy vomit, in favour of their private and extraordinary communications ; and let the modern reasoners and disputers of this world shake hands with their allies, and join in confederacy to set aside the written word, by preferring their own fancies and prejudices to the plainest revelation. But Christ commands us to *search the scriptures* (Joh. v. 39.) ; and St. Paul, to *give attendance to reading* (1 Tim. iv. 13.) ; affirming that the scriptures are *profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.* (2 Tim. iii. 16, 17.) If there have been different, and even contrary interpretations of scripture, let that warn us against the ignorance and obstinacy which have usually occasioned them. Let those who are to teach especially labour by a skill in languages, grammar, criticism, history and antiquity, the Jewish in particular, to understand the plain and primary sense of the letter, though it be a poor jejune element ; for it is nevertheless the element without which we shall never attain to that knowledge, which is to make us *wise unto salvation.* And when the letter is obtained, let us learn to distinguish betwixt the spiritual object and the material type which represents it ; nor rigidly conclude from symbols, points not drawn into comparison in the text, or supported by other parts of the revelation : taking both the thing signified, and the extent of its analogy, not from one particular representation of it, but view it in its several exhibitions, comparing spiritual things with spiritual. This, with the grace of God assisting his

own appointment, will guard us against dangerous errors, though not from mistake in all points. Neither will it help us to a distinct knowledge in spiritual concerns ; for from the disproportion betwixt our faculties, and the true objects, we can see then but *as in a glass, darkly, and know only in part* : conducting ourselves by that reflected light, for *we walk, not by vision, but by faith.* (2 Cor. v. 7.)

Without the word, we can bring forth no fruit ; if we are not careful to prepare the soil for its reception, it will be choaked and die away ; and even when the soil is rightly prepared, the improvement will not be always the same, but God shall cause it to bring forth at his good pleasure, *in some thirty, in some sixty, in some an hundred fold.* (Mark, iv. 8.)

S E R M O N XXII.

The same Subject continued.

TITUS, iii. 5, 6, 7.

—By his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost ; Which he shed on us abundantly, through Jesus Christ our Lord : That being justified by his grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life.

IN treating of the means which God has appointed for the conveyance of the graces of the Holy Ghost distinct from that which is called common or extra-evangelical, I mentioned three particulars ; the written word, and the sacraments of baptism, and the Lord's supper : all which are implied in the general term the Gospel. These three particulars correspond to the three states of the spiritual man, under which he is represented in analogy to the natural man. The first was his conception, to which the written word does peculiarly conduce : how far it is weak, and how far efficacious to this end, was shewn in the last discourse. But conception only is not sufficient to the Christian life, if *when the children are come to the birth, there be no strength to bring forth.* (Isaiah, xxxvii. 3. lxvi. 9.) I proceed therefore to consider,

In the second place, the Christian new birth or regeneration, which is effected by

by baptism, called in the text the laver or *washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost*. The law by which was the knowledge of sin, fills the soul with the horrors of guilt, and the dread of punishment; it shews how vile we are, how offensive to the holiness of God, how much we are exposed to his just resentment; the compass of nature contains no healing medicine that can recover us, *though thou wash thee with nitre, and take thee much soap*, (Jer. ii. 22.) it will not cleanse thee: *the blood of bulls and of goats cannot take away sin*. (Heb. x. 4.) Our old man, loaded with diseases and infirmities, finds its foot-steps incline unto the dead, but knows no Medea's cauldron to restore it again, and give it its long-lost youth and vigor; it despairs of rising with the phoenix from its own ashes, renewed in strength and fresh with life. But our Saviour *brings life and immortality to light through the gospel* (2 Tim. i. 13.); he quiets our fears of the divine vengeance by an assurance of pardon, which he has procured for us by his propitiating blood, that *we may be justified by his grace*; and of new powers that shall be communicated to us, to restore our nature, *by the renewing of the Holy Ghost, which he will shed on us abundantly*; and that the same spirit shall adopt us into the family of God, unite us to him, and make us *heirs of eternal life*. These are the promises of the gospel, *the glad tidings of peace and salvation*. (Is. lii. 7. Rom. x. 15.) The written word, which contains these promises, is the incorruptible seed in which those graces are folded up that are to produce the future Christian. The preachers are they who are ordinarily appointed to cast the seed into the heart; wherefore St. Paul tells the Corinthians, that *in Christ Jesus he had begotten them through the gospel* (1 Cor. iv. 15.), and calls his convert Onesimus, *his son, whom he had begotten* (Philem. 10.), i. e. converted in bonds at Rome. The travail of the new birth is not in him who is to be born, but (as the scriptures (Gal. iv. 19.) and the fathers represent) in the prayers and groans of the church, and the labours of the catechist. And when the graces latent in the word have unfolded themselves, and produced an hearty sorrow for past sins and a sincere resolution of forsaking

them for the future, by renouncing the service of the world, the flesh, and the devil, called *repentance from dead works* (Heb. vi. 1.); together with a full assurance of God's philanthropy and reconcileableness to sinners, of atonement and propitiation *through the sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ*, and of the assistances of the *Holy Spirit* in his *sanctification* to future obedience (1 Pet. i. 2.); and sealing us to an inheritance *incorruptible and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for us*. (1 Pet. i. 4.) This prepares us for the new birth, which is effected at our baptism, the *washing of regeneration*. *Repent and be baptized for the remission of sins* (Aet. ii. 38.): *he that believeth and is baptized shall be saved*. (Matth. xvi. 6.) The written word shews the malignity of the disease, and the method of cure; but baptism is the salutary application of the medicine.

Its proper effect is, in general, salvation; thus the text informs us, *by mercy he saves us, by the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost*. And St. Peter speaking of Noah's deliverance, says, *the like figure whereunto even baptism does also now save us*. (1 Pet. iii. 21.) And our Saviour assures us, that it is necessary to this end, *except one is born again of water and the Holy Ghost, he cannot see or enter into the kingdom of God*. (Joh. iii. 3. 5.) The particular graces conferred in baptism, of which salvation consists, are reckoned in the text, 1. Regeneration, and, 2. Renovation.

1. Regeneration; which contains several benefits, such as, 1. The actual grant, and not the promise only of *remission of sins*; cleansing us from the filth and absolving us from the punishment due to them. *Ye are washed, ye are sanctified, ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the spirit of our God*. (1 Cor. vi. 11.) Which was done at baptism; wherefore Ananias exhorts Paul, *Arise and be baptized, and wash away thy sins*. (Aet. xxii. 16.) This pardon is attended, 2. with a discharge and freedom from bondage, for *Christ died that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is the devil; and deliver them who through fear of death, were all their life-time subject to bondage*. (Heb. ii. 14, 15.) And so many

many of us as are baptized into Jesus Christ, are baptized into his death: Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin. (Rom. vi. 3, 4. 6.) Thus we are delivered from the power of darkness, (Col. i. 13.) and have redemption through the blood of Christ, even the remission of sins. (Eph. i. 7. Col. i. 14.) By his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, that we might be justified by his grace. But regeneration is not completed by forgiving only, but in giving also; and contains these farther graces, 3. Adoption, which is the effect of redemption, for God sent forth his Son, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons. And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father. (Gal. iv. 4, 5, 6.) This is most properly our regeneration, when we are born again of the Spirit, and become the sons of God, being born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God. (Joh. i. 13.) Wherefore the catechumens (i. e. persons preparing for baptism, but not yet baptized) were not allowed to say the Lord's prayer, till they had made themselves sons by regeneration in the waters of baptism. This was the privilege and birthright of the baptized, who then had a right to say, Our Father who art in heaven, when they were born again to such a Father by water and the Holy Ghost. 4. Inheritance, or a title to eternal life, was the privilege of this adoption. If children, then heirs; heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ (Rom. viii. 17.); heirs through hope of eternal life, as the text expresses it; an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for us (1 Pet. i. 4.); to see and enter which, it is necessarily required that we be so born again. (Joh. iii. 3. 5.) And of this new birth the Holy Spirit is the witness and the seal; Ye were sealed with the holy spirit of promise, which is the earnest of our inheritance. (Eph. i. 13, 14.) But regeneration only is not sufficient; if the same person be born again of water, he is still but flesh and blood, and that cannot inherit the kingdom of God. (1

Cor. xv. 50.) Our salvation will not be complete unless we are saved from ourselves, as well as from the power of Satan. It is necessary therefore that we become new creatures, (2 Cor. v. 17.) and be renewed by the Spirit in our minds.

This is the second principal grace mentioned in the text, as conveyed in baptism; the washing of regeneration and renovation by the Holy Ghost. This grace, it is true, necessarily attends the former, for when we are born of the Spirit, we are then changed, and become other persons, we are transformed, by the renewing of our minds, (Rom. xii. 2.) for what is born of the Spirit is spirit. (Joh. iii. 6.) Yet other things are denoted by renovation, than were by regeneration. Such as, getting quit of the rust and corruption of our old nature, putting off the old man with his deeds which is buried with Christ in baptism, and assuming new dispositions and abilities, the beginning to restore us to our original purity and liberty, free from indelible stain, or unconquerable bias or prejudice, rising with Christ in baptism through the faith of the operation of God, (Col. ii. 12.) putting on the new man which is renewed in knowledge, after the image of him that created him. (Col. iii. 10.) So that regeneration is our being born again, and made sons of God by our adoption at baptism, together with the privileges which are thereby made over and sealed to us, 'pardon of sins, or justification,' 'redemption from the tyranny of sin and Satan,' and a 'title to a glorious inheritance.' Renovation attends it, but is a still more secret and wondrous work of the divine Spirit, destroying our old form, the character impressed upon the soul by our corrupt nature, and inducing a new one, restoring it to its original image in the likeness of God, giving new light, new desires, new affections; regeneration therefore, as it is more particularly used, is complete at once, and receives no degrees; but renovation is gradual. An entire new form is indeed wrought at first, but so as to be daily capable of improvement, of new graces, of higher perfection, and a still nearer resemblance of the divine original which we are fashioned after. When baptized with fire by the operation of the Spirit, we are changed as the iron, not in es-

fence, but in quality; our dark inflexible temper brightens in the flame, and is made ready to bend to future instruction, and to receive that perfection which art and care shall afterwards produce. For renovation, as it is ascribed to baptism, which gives it its first spiritual dispositions and capability of receiving the divine image, so also is it represented as the effect of the word written in the prophets and apostles; which supplies suitable arguments for the farther improvement of the understanding, and suitable motives to influence the will, being the *sincere milk to babes* (1 Pet. ii. 2. 1 Cor. iii. 2.), and *strong meat to them that are of full age*. (Heb. v. 14.) Wherefore baptism in which this spirit is administered, which acting like fire gives these new qualities to the soul, was usually called illumination.

These are the graces conveyed in baptism; which yet are not indifferently bestowed, but discreetly dispensed upon conditions. The conditions have been already considered in the former discourse as wrought in our hearts by the ministry of the word; to the producing,

1. An hearty sorrow for sin, and a sincere resolution of forsaking it hereafter, called *conversion or repentance from dead works*: at baptism we are required to testify this conversion by solemnly renouncing the enemy of our salvation the Devil with his great instruments of deceit, the affections of the flesh, and the temptations of the world: and as solemnly giving in our names to the service of the true God, engaging *obediently, to keep God's holy will and commandments, and walk in the same all the days of our life*. Whence baptism was called *the sacrament of conversion*, and is, according to St. Peter, the *answer or stipulation of a good conscience*. (1 Pet. iii. 21.) So that, although he saves us *not by works of righteousness which we have done*, yet he requires that we engage ourselves to perform works of righteousness hereafter, before he will so far receive us into favour as to regenerate and renew us by baptism: which shews the necessity of good works, and that the performance of them is a subsequent condition of that justification which we obtain in baptism. But we are not only to testify our conversion, but,

2dly, Ratify our faith by an open profession of our belief of the great economy of our salvation, in the reconcilableness of the Father, the satisfaction of the Son, and the aids of the Holy Ghost; to be sought for and obtained in the holy Catholic church; for these ends and purposes, the forgiveness of sins, and the inheritance of eternal life. These are the points invariably mentioned in all the ancient creeds; afterwards more fully opened and explained, as the corrupt interpretations of heretics gave occasion. Whence baptism was also called the sacrament of faith, and was supposed to be, on our part, a sealing to the truth of such articles: and the forgiveness of sins being one of these articles which we are required to seal to as the great end of baptism, it follows, either that every one in the church is capable of it; or if there are any persons in the church, who are reprobated from eternity independent of their own behaviour, such persons, when admitted, are required by God to believe what is not true. This stipulation is essentially requisite not only in adults, but also in the sponsors for infants: as it is the best compensation for the want of that actual faith and repentance, of which as infants are incapable, so if there was no method of conveying the benefits and privileges of them, they would be also incapable of salvation. But till they can square their wills to the true meaning of their engagements, baptism, by communicating that same Spirit, which is the author of those graces in the susceptibles, 'will avail to their preservation against all contrary powers; so that if they depart this life before the use of reason, they will by this Christian remedy of the sacrament itself (the charity of the church recommending them) be made free from that condemnation which by one man entered into the world.' If they live, the Spirit, like the reason of their own souls, of which they are also unconscious, is in them as a spark raked up, which will kindle as they grow in years. Wherefore infants being thus capable of the Spirit, which even the adversaries of infant-baptism allow; and capable of salvation, which our Saviour says is not attainable but by those who are born again of water and the Spirit; we infer not the

the lawfulness only, but the expediency of baptizing infants: and so the church uniformly understood that text in St. John till Calvin introduced a new interpretation. And the stipulation of a good conscience being required, we charitably admit the stipulation of sponsors, agreeable to the practice of the Jewish baptism, at that time when our Saviour instituted his, without any notice of an abrogation or disallowance of this part, nor can we find any interruption of this practice in the Christian church.

After the Christian's birth, there is his manhood also; when he becomes fit for service, when he is called upon to bear a part in the Christian warfare, and *to fight the good fight of faith* (1 Tim. vi. 12.), for which, greater measures of grace are necessary, to furnish and arm him with the *weapons of his warfare*. (2 Cor. x. 4.) For this purpose he is brought before the chief officer in the church militant appointed for the dispensation of spiritual gifts, that he may there renew and confirm those engagements, which he entered into at his baptism, before a subordinate, and perhaps not in his own person; and receive, by solemn prayer and invocation, those large effusions of the Holy Ghost, as shall give him the spirit of ghostly strength to combat the temptations with which the world now assaults him, and with which the concupiscence of his nature, not totally eradicated, prompts him to comply: the spirit of wisdom to escape the fascination of his own judgment, now beginning to open and fall in love with its own charms, and all those manifold gifts of grace, which will prove *mighty through God to the casting down imaginations or carnal reasonings, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ*. (2 Cor. x. 5.) The episcopal laying on of hands and benediction thus perfects our baptism; establishes, roots, and confirms us in the faith in which we were before planted; anoints us, as proselytes are presumed to have been after baptism, when taken entirely under the wings of the divine majesty; seals or enlists us, as the soldiers stigma, into God's militia; and gives the Spirit as an earnest, that nothing shall be wanting on God's part, which our situations and

necessities require, where we are not wanting to ourselves; knits us together in the unity of the Spirit; completes our insertion into the church, and is a pledge of our union and communion with it. Thus our Saviour was confirmed by a visible descent of the Holy Ghost after his baptism (Math. iii. 16.): the apostles and disciples on the day of pentecost (Acts, ii. 4.): the new converted church at that time baptized, received afterwards the plentiful effusions of the Spirit by the invocation of the apostles (Acts, iv. 31.): the gentile converts baptized by Philip, had the Holy Ghost poured out upon them by the laying on of hands by *Peter and John*. (Acts, viii. 14, 15, 16.) And when Paul had laid his hands on the Ephesian disciples, (whether Jews or Gentiles, who had been baptized, either immediately before by some assistant of Paul, or long before by *John the Baptist*,) *the Holy Ghost came on them, and they spake with tongues and prophesied* (Acts, xix. 6.), as the occasions of the times then required. The same practice has been continued without any evidence of interruption in every age of the church by episcopal confirmation, giving to every one an earnest of such spiritual supplies, as their own, or the church's exigencies should from time to time make necessary. Thus by these several means the Christian is *first conceived, then born, and at length comes to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man*. (Eph. iv. 13.)

But it is not sufficient that we are born, and arrive at maturity; it is farther necessary that the Christian life be supported, and health maintained. The sacrament therefore of the Lord's supper was ordained to answer the end of spiritual food and medicine. (John, vi. 55.)

1. Of food; 'If our bodies, says Mr. Hooker, did not daily waste, food to restore them were a thing superfluous; and it may be that the grace of baptism would serve to eternal life, were it not that our state of spiritual being is daily so much hindered, and impaired after baptism. While we are subject to diminution, and capable of augmentation in grace, this sacrament is necessary.' *The cup of blessing*, St. Paul tells us, *is the communion of the blood of Christ, and the bread that we break is the communion of*

the body of Christ. (1 Cor. x. 16.) And our Saviour himself assures us of what efficacy and use they are, when he tells us, that his flesh is *meat indeed*, and his blood is *drink indeed*. (John, vi. 55.) Whence Tertullian represents the end of receiving this sacrament, to be, that the soul may feast upon or be fatened with God; or as it may be expressed with more delicacy in the language of the psalmist, it is a means by which God *satisfieth the empty soul, and filleth the hungry soul with goodness*. (Pl. cvii. 9.) For the bread, says Origen, is by prayer made the body of Christ, sacred itself, and sanctifying those who worthily receive it. While it retains a bodily substance in outward appearance, its almighty efficacy manifests the presence of a divine power in it. The cravings of the soul, which hungers and thirsts after righteousness, is nourished thereby; the languid, conscious and afraid of human infirmities, receives strength and vigour to pursue his course, and go on to perfection: the weak and weary, faint with struggling with temptations, and ready to sink under them, are staid and comforted with this divine refreshment: the sorrowful, and afflicted at this world's misfortunes, have the wings of their affections trimmed and disengaged, to soar above carnal thoughts, and leave their cares behind them: all the graces which we had before obtained, but through human weakness since impaired, are here, as our several wants require, renewed, strengthened, or improved. Nor is it our food only, but,

2. Our medicine also; this world is but a kind of hospital whither we are sent for cure; and when that is perfected, we are discharged: so that while we continue, we have some degrees or dregs of the disease remaining, and in perpetual need of the great physician of souls. Our Saviour indeed bespeaks the sinner in baptism, as he did the impotent man healed at Bethesda, *Behold thou art made whole, sin no more, lest a worse thing come unto thee*. (John, v. 14.) But when our consciences accuse us of many subsequent offences, from surprise, daily incursions, and even voluntary sins, it must also suggest to us fears, lest that, as we have broke the covenant, we should also forfeit the benefit of it, and thereby have incurred God's heavier dis-

pleasure. Wherefore it is as necessary, I mean on man's part, for his satisfaction, that the assurance of pardon should be repeated frequently for fresh offences, and the renewal of his own engagements certified after revolt in such a manner as God will accept, as it was at first before such revolt and forfeiture: so that it is of great use to the soul wounded with the serpent's bite, to have a *sign of salvation*, and to *put them in remembrance of the commandment of the law*. (Wisd. xvi. 6.) That by *showing forth the Lord's death till he come* (1 Cor. xi. 26.) they might have in perpetual remembrance his body given for them (Luke, xxii. 19.), and his blood shed for the remission of sins (Matth. xxvi. 28.), and by partaking thereof by faith, may apply the benefit of the remedy to himself; not by any charm in the bread and wine: for what was said of the brazen serpent, may be justly applied to this outward symbol in the Lord's supper, *he that turneth himself towards it, was not saved by the thing that he saw, but by Thee that art the Saviour of all*. (Wisd. xvi. 7.)

Yet lest the frequent repetitions of pardon should prove an encouragement to sin, the church denied the benefit of eucharistical absolution to those whose sins were very grievous in kind, continued in, or highly aggravated: and even in cases where the charity of the church admitted them, the pardon was looked on as not so perfect, as that granted at baptism: the one entirely renewed; the other healed indeed, but left a weakness and a scar behind, which required more care for the future, and larger effusions of grace to strengthen and wear off. To these two effects procured by means of this sacrament, I mean strengthening and restoring grace,

A third is added, the gift of immortality; a promise of it was given in the written word; a title to it was sealed in baptism; but this still more disposes and prepares us for it, as a preservative against the corruption of sin and Satan.

It is one great mean of participating of him, who is life itself. *I*, says our Saviour, *am the bread of life, which came down from heaven; if any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever*. (John, xi. 25.) *Whoso eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood hath eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day*. (John, vi. 48.)

51. 54.) For it is impossible, says Irenæus, that our bodies should continue in the grave, which have been nourished by the body and blood of Christ. This was by the operation of the Holy Ghost, whom, in the ancient liturgies, they invoked to descend on the symbols, and make the bread the body of Christ, and the wine the blood of Christ. Yet they held that what was eaten was indeed bread, though the virtue in that bread was to vivification; and while the cup invited to taste, the spirit that accompanied it led to immortality.

But what are food and medicine to him that cannot breathe? Inspiration and expiration are continued signs and means of life. The true Christian therefore must *open his mouth, and draw in the Spirit*. (Ps. cxix. 131.) The Holy Ghost first inspires us with the *spirit of supplications* (Zach. xii. 10.), which when received, we must breathe out again in prayers for continual supplies of grace, which being according to the direction of the spirit and *the will of God* (Rom. viii. 26, 27.) will be a most effectual means of obtaining them; *for if ye being evil know how to give good gifts unto your children; how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?* (Luke, xi. 13.) This is an exercise without which the Christian cannot live at all; he must *pray without ceasing* (1 Theff. v. 17.), *continue in prayer* (Col. iv. 2.): *men ought always to pray, and not to faint* (Luke, xviii. 1.); never remit that devout frame and disposition of soul, which is always open to receive the divine influences, and comply with its motions; expecting from our heavenly Father every good thing we want, directing all our actions in obedience to his will, and to his glory. This, according to Origen, is *to pray without ceasing*, for a good life is the Christian's great and continual prayer. In which we must never wilfully omit the daily stated opportunities of what is more properly and strictly called Praying: nay, if unavoidably interrupted, we may express our earnest desires in short and quick ejaculations, which are the pantings of the soul after God: and even in cases where the sense of danger almost overcomes us, and the proper means of escape and deliverance are so hidden, that we know not what to pray for, the soul

has still this relief, it may send forth its groans unuttered, and the Spirit will be present to help our infirmities, and make effectual intercession to him *who searcheth the heart, and knoweth the mind of the spirit*. (Rom. viii. 27.) But we must not confine ourselves to our closets in private prayer; we must walk abroad, and seek those public places where this Spirit breathes more freely, or descends in more abundance: and this is the sanctuary or place of public worship. There rested the cloud (Exod. xl. 34. 1 Kings, viii. 10.), as it were in token of a plentiful effusion: he visits every place: there is no going from this Spirit; but his *shekinah*, his *dwelling*, and *resting place* (Psalm, cxxxii. 15.) is here. The Jews have a saying, that wheresoever two or three are sitting together, and conferring together about the law, there the Shekinah will be with them. Which our Saviour has confirmed, with regard to prayer, saying, *If two of you shall agree on earth as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I* (by his Spirit) *in the midst of them*. (Matth. xviii. 19, 20.) How great a lover of agreement and harmony this uniting Spirit is, what an enemy to dividing and separating, we may learn from his making the congregation the seat where he delights to dwell: his most extraordinary effusion was, when the whole Christian church was met together on the day of Pentecost, when *the disciples were all with one accord in one place*. (Acts, ii. 1.) He accompanies the sacrament of water, to *baptize us into one body*. (1 Cor. xii. 13.) He blesses the sacramental bread, *that we being many may by partaking of it be one loaf and one body*. (1 Cor. x. 17.) This love of unity was as evident under the Mosaic dispensation; all were to meet once a year at Jerusalem; and when their dispersion prevented this, they are represented as *dry bones* scattered in the valley. (Ezek. xxxvii. 1. 7. 10.) It is promised indeed that they shall be restored again to life, which was the promise of sending the Holy Ghost in the days of the Messiah, under the gospel dispensation: but in order to this, the emblem relates, that the bones were to come together first, bone to his bone, before the breath

would come into them and make them live.

I do not mention orders, not only because, like confirmation, it is but a more solemn kind of prayer and invocation, and so might pass under that head; but because it is not properly the means of deriving sanctifying grace to the receiver, which confirmation is; its peculiar end being to convey the gift of office and ability; and which has fallen in my way to be treated of already.

The providence of God in his judgments, his trials, and his mercies, are also sometimes considered as means of grace; but perhaps they might more properly be called seasons and occasions, kindly dispensed by God for the exercise and unfolding those graces which had been before administered by other means. However, if means, they are such as God has entirely reserved in his own hands, and are not in the power of the church to dispense. Wherefore they are not reckoned among the means of gospel, but of extra-evangelical grace, common to every man as well without as within the church, and which it is no part of our duty, as Christians, to seek after, but to be careful to make a proper use of, when it shall please God to visit us with them.

I have now attended the Christian from the womb to his consummation; viewed the principles and rudiments of grace, and watched them as they gradually expanded into more and more perfect degrees of holiness, preparing the receiver for an eternal weight of glory. (2 Cor. iv. 17.) Operations so superior to nature, so remote from our apprehensions, that as few are rash enough to pretend to explain, so neither are there very many found who care to attend even to what is revealed concerning them. But the happy subject in whom they are wrought, knows them to be the work of God: he experiences that there is a new creation (2 Cor. v. 17.), and a resurrection from the dead (Eph. ii. 5, 6.), effects disproportioned to the visible means employed; whence he has a lively sense and demonstration within him of those several points, which have been laid down as the general heads of discourse in this lecture.—He knows many great and invaluable advantages in the present *fruits of the Spirit* (Gal. v. 22.), besides

the *hope* (Tit. iii. 7.), nay more, the *earnest* (Eph. i. 14.) of an heavenly inheritance.—He has a certainty that he has *received the Holy Ghost*; and that the same blessed Spirit dwells within him, by the motions and continuance of his graces (Rom. viii. 13.), in a full assurance of pardon (Col. ii. 13.), in an unfeigned love of God (Rom. v. 15.), and of his brother (1 John, iv. 12, 13.), in new desires, new affections, new dispositions which transform his mind (Rom. xii. 2.), and alienate him from this world (Col. iii. 1, 2.), lifting it upwards to that which is above. These mighty works within him are so many proofs of the divinity of the power by whom they are wrought, and not justify only, but require worship from him to the divine Author. It is certainly our duty to look up to the hand from which we receive such benefits, and begin our grateful and devout acknowledgments as St. Paul does, by mentioning first the immediate giver, *there are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit.* (1 Cor. xii. 4.) Let us beseech him that he would continue, and make his abode with us, beautify our souls with every virtue, enlighten them with every grace, cleanse them from all filthiness and corruption, and strengthen them to immortality! Yet let us not rest here, since the same Spirit teaches us for whose sake, and by whose purchase, and according to whose will, as the economy of salvation requires, these gifts and graces are administered. *There are diversities of administrations, but the same Lord.* And as *through him, by the Spirit, we have access to the Father* (Eph. ii. 18.), from whom originally comes every good and perfect gift (James, i. 17.), all divine power and efficacy, *there are diversities of operations, but it is the same God, that worketh all in all*: therefore with a due sense of this great honour and privilege, as sons of God, let us address ourselves to him for pardon, and admission to our heavenly inheritance, ‘O God the Father of heaven, have mercy upon us miserable sinners!’ But as we have no deserts of our own, no works of righteousness to claim his favour by, and are entitled only through the sufferings and satisfaction of Christ, let us beseech him to intercede for us, and plead his merits with the Father, ‘O God the Son, Redeemer of the world, have mercy upon us miserable

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able sinners !' And since the benefits of his merits are applied, and our pardon sealed, and ourselves enabled to render an acceptable service only by the operations and assistances of the Holy Spirit, let us implore his aid also, ' O God the Holy Ghost, proceeding from the Father and the Son, have mercy upon us miserable sinners !' Yet remembering that, how various soever the economy may be, salvation is the one sole undivided end and work of all, therefore to them as the one sole undivided cause of all, let us address our earnest prayers and invocations as to the great Power to whom we have consecrated ourselves and services, ' O holy, blessed, and glorious Trinity, three persons and one God, have mercy upon us miserable sinners !' And to this holy, blessed, and glorious Trinity, for the means of grace by them vouchsafed to us, and for the hopes of glory hereafter, be ascribed, as is most due, all honour, majesty, and dominion, all praise and adoration, both now and for ever. Amen.

S E R M O N XXIII.

By RICHARD DUKE, A. M.

On the Divinity and Humanity of Jesus Christ.

HEB. ii. 16, and part of the 17th verse.

For verily he took not on him the nature of angels, but he took on him the seed of Abraham. Wherefore in all things it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren.

THE incarnation of our blessed Saviour is set forth in the words that I have just now read unto you, so clearly as to the evidence of it, and so advantageously, both as to the goodness of willing it, and the wisdom of contriving it, that I could not pitch on any more fit for the subject of your meditation at this season, set apart by the piety of the church for the solemn and devout commemoration of this great *mystery of godliness, God manifested in the flesh*. For in these words,

I. The incarnation of the Son of God is set forth most clearly as to the evidence of it, we in them being plainly taught and beyond all exception convinced of

the truth of the catholic faith in this important article ; the first member of the text being an invincible proof of the divinity, as the second is of the humanity of our blessed Lord.

1st, We have here an undeniable argument of the eternal divinity of Christ before his appearing in the flesh. For he in whose free choice it was to take upon him either of the two natures, that of angels or that of men, must of necessity have been a person existing before he made that choice, and also of a different nature from either of those two natures, one of which he was pleased in time to assume into his own ; and therefore not a mere man of no elder being than from his birth of the blessed virgin, as most impiously the Socinians, nor even one of the highest rank of angels, before this visible world's creation, yet a creature, as the Arians, though with more seeming honour to our Saviour's person, yet with equal repugnancy to his word and doctrine, affirm.

2dly, We have here likewise as clear a proof of Christ's real humanity. This being also a material part of our faith, and as necessary to be believed as his essential divinity. And what can more plainly be taught ? How can a doctrine in more express words be laid down than this is here, where we are told that *he took upon him the seed of Abraham, and was in all things made like unto his brethren ?*

II. Again, secondly, the same wonderful mystery is here set forth most advantageously, and that,

1st, As to the exceeding grace and goodness of it to mankind, in that after the fall both of angels and men, he left the one unpitied, unregarded, in the wretched state which by their apostacy and rebellion they had justly brought themselves into, *reserved in everlasting chains under darkness unto the judgment of the great day* (Jude, 6.) ; and yet out of infinite compassion to the other, laid hold of them as soon as ever they fell, and immediately after the act of their rebellion, for which they as justly ought to have had their portion for ever with the devil and his angels, gave a promise of that, which in the fulness of time he performed, when by making himself one of them, he advanced them to a more glorious state than that from which they fell, made them heirs of everlasting light and endless felicity.

2dly, As to the wonderful wisdom in contriving this means of salvation: in order to which *it behoved him to be made like to his brethren*. This method, which God has been pleased to make use of to bring about the redemption of mankind, was of all others the most wise and the most fitting for so divine a purpose. God sent his Son to be made man, that he might be a ransom for man, a price indeed infinitely above the value of the purchase, and a means immeasurably beyond the end, yet not unfitly, nor ungloriously: not ungloriously, because the salvation of man, and the whole economy and ordering of it, tends lastly to the glory of God: nor unfitly, because of the singular use and infinite benefits of this method above all others to the sons of men, for both which reasons, *in all things it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren*.

These four particulars then we see are manifestly contained in, or naturally deduced from, the words of the text:

I. The divinity of our Saviour pre-existent to his humanity.

II. His assuming, in time, the human nature into that divine nature, which he had with the Father, from all eternity.

III. The infinite grace and love to mankind expressed in preferring them; in assuming their nature rather than that of the lapsed angels, who equally stood in need of a Redeemer.

IV. The admirable wisdom and fitness of this method of our redemption, by Christ's becoming the Son of man, to advance us to the high privilege of being the sons of God.

Of which, in their order, and as briefly as may be, that I may in the last place, proceed to make some practical inferences from the whole.

I. And first of the first, namely, the divinity of our Saviour, the eternal Son of the eternal Father, and his everlasting existence before his appearing in the flesh, plainly here taught us, in that *he took not on him the nature of angels, but took on him the seed of Abraham*. For though the original says only, as in the margin of our Bible it is owned, *he taketh not hold of angels*, yet how could it be worth the remark of a divinely inspired Apostle, that Christ should not, in any sense that in scripture usage the word *ἐπιλαμβάνεσθαι* is capable of, lay hold of angels, creatures of so different and superior a nature

to his own, if he was merely man, either to save them from falling (as the word is used in St. Matthew's gospel, to express our Saviour's catching Peter as he was sinking), or to help them up and restore them when they were fallen? Is it to be thought, if, according to Arius, he was one of the supreme order of angels, that he would not lay hold of them if he could? Or if, according to Socinus, he was a man only, can it be conceived how he could if he would? But let the translation which our church has upon very good grounds so long authorised, so just, so consonant to the whole tenor of the Apostle's design, and so agreeable to the analogy of faith, be allowed, as no reason appears why it should not, and from thence we may rightly infer, as was before hinted, that he must have been neither angel nor man, while it was in deliberation whether of those two natures he would take upon him, and therefore must have needs been God, there being no third nature besides the divine that can possibly be ascribed to him. He must also actually have had a being, before he could make that choice, rejecting the one nature and assuming the other, out of his own good pleasure. Accordingly he, who the Apostle here says took upon him the seed of Abraham, tells us of himself, *Before Abraham was I am. I am* declaring hereby not only his existence, but his essence, his divine nature, not only that he was, but what he was, that is, no other than the Lord Jehovah, he whose incommunicable name is *I am*, as himself spake to Moses, *Thou shalt say unto them, I am hath sent me*. (Exod. iii. 14.) But is it needful in a Christian auditory to undertake the defence of the divinity of Christ? Is it needful to go about to industriously prove to you, that in the whole solemnity and worship of this day, we have not all been committing the most gross idolatry? For if Christ be not God, our whole religion is no better. Is it needful to cite to you all those plain texts of scripture, so many and so obvious, in which this fundamental truth is contained? *That the word was God*; and that *that word was made flesh*, that Christ himself tells us, that *he and the Father are one*, that *he came forth from the Father*, and *what if ye shall see the Son of man ascend up where he was before?* and that solemn address of Christ to the Father just before

his

his passion, and now, *O Father, glorify me with thine own self, with the glory which I had with thee before the world was.* And again, *no man has ascended into heaven but he that came down from heaven, the Son of man who is in heaven;* which being spoken by our Lord while he was yet on earth, implies that he *so came down from heaven as still to be in heaven*, that is, in respect of his divinity, by which he is every where present. But not to multiply texts in a matter so clear, as this is, to every one that without prejudice or prepossession has ever read the gospel; if Christ were a mere man only, as the heresy that grows and thrives so much daily among us, if without allowance or encouragement, yet without check or controul, pretends, to what purpose does our Saviour and his Apostles lay so great stress upon God's sending him into the world to redeem it? Why do they so frequently and so emphatically magnify and extol this action as the highest and chiefest mark of God's love to mankind? *God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son!* says he himself; and St. John, *in this was manifested the love of God, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him.* If we look upon all this as no more but that God should cause a man to be born after another manner than the rest of men, and then deliver him up, who by his own nature was mortal, to die for the expiation of the sins of the whole world; if the death of a man could in this case avail any thing, what such mighty and wonderful expression of his love to us, can we discover in this way of redemption, more than would have appeared if he had redeemed us any other way? It had been indeed a greater and more wonderful love to Christ if he had been man only, for God to employ him in this glorious work, and for his reward to advance him, if such a thing were possible, to the partnership of his own divinity. For it is more to make one man a god, than to make all mankind kings and saints, and capable of enjoying God and reigning with him to all eternity. But it is not God's love to Christ in this wonderful dispensation, for he gave him for us, he spared not him that he might spare us, but God's love to the world, to the whole race of lost mankind, that the scripture every where so justly magnifies and extols. Nor is it so

much the redemption itself, as the surprising method and means of it, and the infinite dignity of the Redeemer, that both Christ and St. John aim at, in the fore cited places, as the highest recommendation and most astonishing instance of the divine love. And surely the sending his *only begotten Son*, the *giving him for the sins of the world*, the *not sparing his own Son*, carry a much higher and diviner sense in the language of our Saviour and his Apostles, than to deserve to be so blasphemously trifled with, as they and the most clear and express texts relating to the divine nature of Christ, have been and continue to be, by being spuriously criticised upon, and pedantically debased out of all their noble significance, into a meaning low, contemptible, and absurd! We might possibly without danger to the truth, venture the whole matter of debate between us and the *deniers of the Lord that bought them*, upon this issue. We will out of the gospel produce our texts for the divinity of our Saviour, and then be content to refer it to any disinterested Heathen or Jew, or if they please, to any of their own dear friends among the Mahometan Unitarians, whether the truths that we so earnestly contend for, as the *faith once delivered to the saints*, be not clearly laid down and manifestly contained in them? And consequently, if they believed those passages to be immediately inspired from God, as these men that we have to deal with pretend to do, and as their great Master, with great strength of reason, once by him rightly employed, has proved that they are, whether they would not gladly embrace them, and readily subscribe to them? And if so, are not Jews, or Turks, or profest Infidels, in this case more excusable than these perverters of those revelations which they themselves acknowledge to be divine? Certainly it would be much more ingenuous, roundly and frankly to reject at once the whole gospel than thus to use it. And this proceeding would better become that candor and freedom of spirit, and philosophical plainness and natural probity, that is so much pretended and boasted of by some men. But to vex and wrest scripture at the rate they do, to expound it to any sense by the most forced, improper, and unusual interpretations, as the Socinians freely own they do, and will do, rather

rather than acknowledge any doctrine in it which seems to contradict their reason, particularly this of the incarnation of the Son of God, is to assume such a power over divine writ as over any human writing, would never be allowed or endured; nay worse, is to make the oracles of the true God, designed to enlighten and instruct mankind, as ambiguous and obscure as those delivered by the false Gods of the heathen, on purpose to deceive, that is, according to a very great man of our own church, but one who was never accused of harshness of expression, or too great an inveteracy or prejudice against them, to 'treat the word of God like the word of the devil.' And now I leave it to every one's impartial judgment, whether they, who by denying Christ's divinity, pretend to a more pure and rational Christianity, can, without or indeed with putting charity to the utmost stretch, be allowed so much as the name of Christians.

II. Secondly, We are to consider the reality of Christ's human nature, which was as necessary as the other to his being a mediator between God and man. Therefore the Apostle teaches us *there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus*. The second Adam was as truly a man as the first, *that since by man came death, by man also should come the resurrection from the dead*. But I shall wave insisting on the proof of the manhood of Christ, for though he that is both God and man was as early denied to be man as God, yet the now most prevailing heresy, and from which at present the true faith is in most danger, is so far from taking from him the true nature of man, that it will allow him to have truly no other. I shall therefore conclude both these heads with this one observation, that though we had none of those many plain and positive doctrinal assertions in holy scripture, of the two distinct natures of our blessed Lord, yet the bare history of his actions upon earth, a simple narrative only of his life, his miracles, his death and resurrection, would be sufficient to prove him, what we, with the whole catholic church, believe him to be, both God and man. And this is the proof which our church makes use of in that plain but excellent homily on the incarnation, as fitted for the capacity of the weakest, as the conviction of the wisest.

In that he did hunger and thirst, eat and drink, sleep and wake, in that he wept and sorrowed over Jerusalem, in that he suffered the most grievous pains both of body and soul, and finally death itself: what can be more apparent than that he was perfect man as we are? But in that he forgave sins, cast out devils, knew the thoughts of men's hearts, walked upon the waves, and had the winds and the seas at his command, lastly and chiefly in that he raised himself from death to life, and ascended up into heaven: what can be more evident than that he was perfect God also, and equal to the Father as touching his deity? 'It is therefore necessary to everlasting salvation, that we thus believe rightly the incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ. And the right faith is, that we believe and confess, that our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is God and man.'

III. I come now to the third particular, the infinite grace and love to mankind expressed in preferring them and assuming their nature rather than that of the fallen angels, who stood equally in need of a Redeemer.

Without all controversy, says the Apostle elsewhere, *great is the mystery of godliness, God manifest in the flesh*. Absolutely and by itself considered wondrous great, but behold the same mystery here, by the comparison of angels and men, made much greater and infinitely more gracious. That God, who is himself a spirit, should rather assume flesh than spirits; that he should choose wretched man, vile dust and ashes, and pass by those once glorious heavenly and immortal spirits; that God the Father, *who spared not the angels that sinned*, as St. Peter tells us, should yet be so desirous to spare men, that for their sakes *he spared not his own Son*, as St. Paul assures us; that the glorious cherubim and seraphim, thrones, dominions, principalities and powers, so far before and above us in every thing else, should in this dignity conferred on our nature by being taken into the Godhead, come so far behind and beneath us, is beyond the rules and reach of our weak reason, is matter of wonder and astonishment. It casts me into an ecstasy, says St. Chrysostom, and makes me imagine of our nature some great matter, I cannot well express what. *Lord, what is man, that thou art mindful of him,*

him, or the son of man, that thou regardest him! says holy David transported with the wonder of God's goodness to man in that he made him *a little lower than the angels*. But the wonder is now infinitely increased, for by taking our nature, Christ has made him a great deal higher than the angels. For those bright and immortal spirits, since his incarnation, have and do continually adore our nature in the personal, indivisible, but unconfused union with the Deity. As the Apostle to the Hebrews, *when he bringeth in the first begotten into the world, he saith, Let all the angels of God worship him.* (Heb. i. 6.)

And can we pass by this wonderful grace and dignity conferred on our nature, without asking the question which St. John Baptist's mother did on a like occasion, *Whence is this to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?* (Luke, i. 43.) Whence is this to us, that the Lord himself should come to us? should be one of us? If the angels themselves were not counted worthy of this favour, whence is this to us?

We may find among the fathers, who have ventured to search after an account of so wonderful a dispensation, several reasons or inducements why God rather had compassion on us than those heavenly spirits that fell: I shall mention, and but just mention, two the most probable and satisfactory.

The first is that of St. Austin, that man's case was more to be pitied than theirs, because man was by them tempted, and deceived by the cunning of their chief; but the angels had no tempter, none but themselves, their own pride and ambition, to seduce them to so foul an apostacy. There was nothing of ignorance or deceit to lessen the voluntariness of their sin; they fell in the light of heaven, and rendered themselves incapable of pity. But man, as he fell by the devil's malice, was the fitter object of God's mercy; and accordingly, as he was undone by another's wickedness, he was recovered by another's merit.

The second is, that when the angels rebelled, though some fell, yet others stood, each of them sinned and suffered only for himself, did not involve a whole nature in his guilt, and so they all did not perish. But in the first man that sinned all men fell, all were virtually and fe-

derally in Adam, and the decree of death passed upon all mankind, in him concluded under the common condemnation. And should God's creation be thus destroyed, and his goodness defeated, by the malice of the devil? *Hast thou made all men for nought?* says the Psalmist. (lxxxix. 47.) That cannot be, so great wisdom cannot do so great a work in vain; but in vain it had been if God had not shewn mercy, and therefore was man's case, rather than that of the fallen angels, matter of the divine commiseration and pity.

Thus they reasoned, and perhaps not amiss; but it will better become us humbly to adore the plain revelation of his love, than curiously to pry into the hidden secrets of his wisdom, to ascribe all this to *the tender mercies of our God, whereby he from on high hath visited us; to the great love wherewith he loved us*, as the Apostle speaks. *God so loved the world*, says our Saviour, *that he gave his only begotten Son*; and we, taught by him, for a reason of this great mystery, say only, *even so, Lord, for so it seemed good in thy sight.* (Luke, x. 21.)

IV. Which leads me to the fourth thing to be considered, and that is the admirable wisdom and fitness of this method, which God has made use of for our redemption. *It behoved that in all things he should be made like unto his brethren.*

Whether God could have found out any other means of restoring lost man, besides this of making himself the Son of man, is not only an unnecessary, but a presumptuous enquiry; though some have ventured to go thus far, from the natural inherent justice of God, and his perfect and immutable hatred to sin, and his inflexible regard to the honour of his law, which was violated, and the vindication of his truth by which he stood obliged to punish the violation of it with the death which he had threatened; to conclude, that without so full a satisfaction as that of the precious blood of his only and entirely beloved Son, he could not have released us from the curse to which we were all justly subject by our disobedience. But forbearing thus rashly to *shorten his arm*, or to limit his wisdom, we may yet boldly affirm, that since he has been pleased to make use of this way, it is for that very reason to be believed the most fitting of all others, and most

most wise; and that in respect of his own glory, and the benefit of mankind.

1st, Of his own glory. This was the ineffable contrivance of the divine council, that God and man should be joined in one person, that so as man he might become a sacrifice for sin, and as God, make his sacrifice worthy to be accepted, his manhood giving him a capacity to suffer, and his godhead giving a value to his sufferings. Thus is God magnified in all his excellencies, having to the triumph of his mercy out of the hidden treasures of his wisdom excited by his love, found an expedient how both sin should be punished and the sinner pardoned; his justice at the same time fully satisfied; his majesty undiminished; his truth preserved entire and inviolate, by a person of infinite dignity interposing in the offender's room, answering the strictest demands of offended omnipotence, and doing not only right but honour to every one of his essential attributes and divine perfections.

2dly, In respect of the benefit of mankind, and the singular uses which we may, and should make of this gracious method which his wisdom has pitched upon for our redemption.

1st, For, first, God has not only hereby secured his own honour, and vindicated the authority of his law, by exacting so high and full a satisfaction for the breach of it, but has publicly also given the greatest discouragement to sin that can possibly be conceived, by so illustrious a manifestation of his irreconcilable aversion and mortal hatred to it, in punishing it so severely in the bitter sufferings and death of him, in whom he was ever well pleased. In that he spared not him, God has openly declared and convinced the world that he hates sin, if infinity were capable of degree, even more than he loved his own Son.

2dly, By this means of Christ's being made in every thing like to us, and in this likeness familiarly conversing with us, and fulfilling all righteousness, God has both given us a perfect and imitable example of holiness and obedience, and by this means also taken away all manner of excuse that we might pretend to from the inequality or impossibility of his commands. By the man Christ Jesus without sin he has convinced us both of the goodness and the easiness of his law, which

commands nothing but what God himself when he was made man thought it became him to do. Is not the ready and perfect obedience which Christ in our nature paid, a full demonstration how reasonable a service God requires at our hands, while he exacts from us no other duties, but what are so excellent in themselves, that the Son of God was willing, and so possible to us, that the Son of Man was able to perform them?

3dly, It behoved Christ to be made like unto us, for our great comfort and encouragement. In all things like unto us: for he did not only take our nature, but all the infirmities of it, and having been subject to all the evils and temptations of our frail mortality, cannot but have a fellow feeling of all our sufferings, remembering his own, and be ready in all our afflictions and temptations to support and deliver us, to supply our wants and assist our weakness, and to shew mercy and to afford grace to help in time of need. And this is the particular use that the Apostle here makes of this gracious dispensation in the words immediately following the text. *Wherefore in all things it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God: for in that he himself suffered, being tempted, he is able to succour them that are tempted.*

Lastly, We have hence a comfortable assurance of an equal and merciful Judgment at that great day when *God shall judge the world by the Man whom he hath ordained.* For, for this reason God hath given him authority to execute judgment, because he is the Son of Man. Had it been allowed to us to have chosen ourselves a judge, who could we have rather wished for, from whom could we expect a more favourable sentence than from a man like ourselves? one who has shewn the greatest kindness that can be possibly conceived for human nature, who is sensible of the follies and infirmities and temptations of it, who will not require in us the purity of the angels or unbodied spirits, for he experimentally knows whereof we are made, and remembers that we are but dust. And surely we may conclude God has not designed that sentence should pass upon us according to the rigour of the law, but the mildness and mercies of the gospel, since he has appointed him to be our judge,

judge, who is our redeemer, who is our high priest, who is our intercessor, who is our advocate, who is our brother.

Thus we see, that upon many great accounts and important considerations it behoved, it was highly fitting and reasonable and advantageous, it was an appointment of infinite wisdom and goodness, that the Saviour of the world should in all things be made like unto his brethren.

I shall now draw some few practical inferences from what has been said, and so conclude.

1st, Then, it is very meet and right and our bounden duty, that we should at all times and in all places give all possible thanks and praise to our merciful Redeemer, for this gracious condescension in abasing himself so far as to be the son of man, that he might exalt us to be the sons of God. Should not we gladly join with that heavenly host, who not envying our felicity, though so much preferred to their once glorious but now fallen and miserable fellow spirits, ushered in the birth of God incarnate, with this triumphant song, *Glory be to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good-will towards men!* Shall these who have no interest or share in this great salvation be desirous to bow down and look into this glorious mystery, and shall not we who are so much concerned lift up our hearts, raise up our souls to a devout contemplation, and frequent and serious and grateful meditation of his incomprehensible love, who for us men and for our salvation came down from heaven and was made man? What warmth of affection, what light of joy, what incense of gratitude should the sense of so invaluable a blessing kindle and for ever keep alive in our spirits? Abraham, whose seed he long after took upon him, was transported with the obscure and confused apprehension, with the remote foresight only of so great a blessing, *He saw this day afar off and was glad.* How should we then be affected, to whom the Son of God is actually come! What thanks shall we render, what acknowledgments can we pay, I do not say equal, but in any wise suitable and becoming for such mighty love, not in dim shadows, as to this great patriarch the friend of God prefigured only and promised, but in real blessings substantially performed! Certainly the best way of expressing our joy and gratitude and love, is heartily to com-

ply with, and as much as in us lies to promote and forward this merciful design of the Son of God in being made man! O let not us frustrate the counsel of infinite wisdom, O let not us do despite to the kindness of ineffable love! Let not us receive this grace in vain! This grace which has appeared indeed to all men, but bringeth salvation to those only whom it teaches to deny all ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live soberly and righteously in this present world, looking for his second glorious appearing, for which if we have not rightly prepared ourselves, it will be much better for us that the first had never been. For if we still continue in our sins after such wonderful, wise, and gracious means used for our recovery, we shall be more wicked and less worthy of mercy than those miserable apostate spirits whom Christ passed by and had no compassion of when he delivered us. The sins of men after Christ's having lived with them and died for them, are by many aggravations made worse than that of the Devil himself. For he never sinned against example, being the first offender, nor against God's patience and long suffering, being upon the first offence cast into hell, nor lastly against remedy, there having never been any means offered for his recovery. But for us men, all that the love of God could will, or his wisdom contrive for our good, has been made use of. And how shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation? Let us not flatter ourselves, or think that we have any interest in any of those innumerable blessings which his being made one of us has procured for us, if we perform not the equal and easy conditions upon which they are offered to us; if we suffer him not to bless us in his own way; and we are by the Holy Ghost informed how that is, namely, by turning us away every one from our iniquities. Let us not then say within ourselves, we have Abraham for our father, and him that took upon him the seed of Abraham for our brother, if we go on in our iniquities, lest we justly receive the same rebuke which the Jews did from him, when he was upon earth. I know that ye are Abraham's seed, says our Saviour to those hypocritical pretenders, that is, that you boast of your high descent from that great man, and that according to the flesh ye are what ye pretend to be, really descended from him; but

but yet you have none of that spiritual and more valuable relation to him which only can entitle you to those glorious promises made to him as father of the faithful, and to as many as are the heirs of his faith. For if ye were in this divine and comfortable sense Abraham's children, the works of Abraham ye would do. Let us thus secure our title and adoption by bearing as near a similitude as is possible to this our elder brother. If in our lives are expressed the resemblance and lineaments of his divine perfections, if in our conversations there appear any remarkable traces of his innocence and purity, his sanctity and love, his humility and meekness, his zeal for the honour of God and the welfare of man, if we are thus conformed to the image of his son, his honourable true and only son by nature, for this likeness to the first born, God will own us also for his sons by adoption and grace, nor will Christ be ashamed to call us brethren. Let us then, since he has condescended in all things to be made like unto us, earnestly endeavour to be made like unto him. Let us not by the impurities of sin disgrace and dishonour that flesh which he has been pleased so highly to dignify as to partake of, let us reverence and keep holy and undefiled that nature which he has so far honoured as to assume and unite unto his own. And since he has vouchsafed to take upon him our flesh, let us, in return, as the apostle exhorts, put on the Lord Jesus Christ. Let us set all the graces and virtues of that divine life, which he out of his great humility was pleased to lead here among us as a constant pattern and exact rule to model and fashion our own by, that by a lively faith in his infallible word, and a cheerful obedience to his holy will, and a studious imitation of his perfect example, we may at last be made meet to be partakers of those joys that he has purchased for all those that love, and obey, and resemble him.

To whom therefore be paid all adoration, praise, and thanksgiving; be ascribed, as is most due, together with the Father and the Holy Spirit, all might, majesty, and dominion, both now and for evermore. Amen.

SERMON XXIV.

By ARCHBISHOP SHARPE.

The great benefits of our Salvation by Christ represented and applied.

Mat. i. 21.

And thou shalt call his name Jesus, for he shall save his people from their sins.

SALVATION imports in general some great deliverance from any evil or danger; thus God's conducting the Israelites through the Red Sea, and delivering them out of the hands of the Philistines, is called a great salvation. But salvation, by way of eminence, is applied to that wonderful deliverance, which our blessed Saviour procured for mankind, by saving them from the punishment of their sins; and in the New Testament is the same as our redemption by Christ. This is that salvation, referred to by St. Paul, *how shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation?* Indeed it also signifies the doctrine or gospel of Christ, which tenders this salvation to mankind. From these words, I shall consider the great benefits and blessings contained in this salvation, and the many encouragements we have given us, to endeavour to obtain it.

The salvation which Christ purchased, and the gospel tenders to every creature, is a comprehension of the greatest blessings God can bestow; a deliverance from the most dreadful evils that mankind can suffer. It contains all that can make the nature of man perfect, or his life happy; and secures him from whatever can render his condition miserable. The blessings of it are inexpressible, and beyond imagination. *Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him.* For, to be saved, as Christ came to save the world, is to have all our innumerable sins and transgressions forgiven and blotted out; all those heavy loads of guilt, which oppressed our souls, perfectly removed from our minds. It is to be reconciled to God, and restored to his favour; so that he will be no longer an angry, terrible, and revengeful God; but a most kind, compassionate

compassionate, and tender-hearted father. It is to be at peace with him, and with our consciences; to have a title to his peculiar love, care, and protection, all our days; to be rescued from the bondage and dominion of sin, and the tyranny of the devil. It is to be translated from the power of darkness, into the kingdom of our dear Lord; so that sin shall reign no longer in our mortal bodies, but we shall serve God in newness of spirit. It is to be placed in a state of true freedom and liberty, to be no longer under the controul of blind passions, and hurried on by our impetuous lusts, to do what our reason condemns. It is to have a new principle of life infused in our souls, whereby we shall be enabled to live up to the perfection of our nature, and in some degree partake of the divine. It is to have the Holy Spirit lodged in our hearts, whose comfortable influence will ever cheer and refresh us; and by whose wise counsels we shall be always advised, directed, and governed. It is to be transformed into the image of God; to be like him in wisdom, righteousness, and all other perfections, of which man's nature is capable. Again,

To be saved as Christ came to save mankind, is to be delivered from the wrath to come, and from that dreadful vengeance which shall be one day inflicted on the whole world; when the heaven shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall be burnt up with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burnt up. When the Lord shall descend from heaven with a mighty shout, with ten thousand of his angels, to take vengeance in flaming fire, upon all ungodly men, for all their ungodly deeds that they have committed; when all men, both small and great, dead and living, shall be summoned to appear before his dreadful and impartial tribunal, to give an account of all their actions. When the greatest and most prosperous sinners shall tremble and be confounded; when they shall hide themselves in the dens, and rocks of the mountains; saying to the mountains and rocks, fall on us, and hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb, whose salvation they have despised; from this dreadful day of wrath, and those amazing terrors that attend it, doth Christ's

salvation, and that only, set us free. But further yet:

To be saved, as Christ came to save the world, is to be translated after this life is ended, into a state of eternal felicity; never more to die or suffer the uneasiness and infirmities of an earthly body; never more to know pain and sickness, grief and sorrow, labour and weariness, disquiet or vexation: but to live in perfect ease and peace, freedom and liberty; and to enjoy ourselves and the greatest good, after the most perfect manner, for evermore. It is to have our bodies, that sleep in the dust, raised again and reunited to our souls; and to be no longer gross, earthly, corruptible bodies, but spiritual, heavenly, immortal ones; fashioned like unto Christ's glorious body, in which he now sits at the right hand of God. It is to live in the city of the great king, the heavenly Jerusalem, where the glory of the Lord fills the place with perpetual light and bliss. It is to spend an eternity in the most noble and agreeable employments; in viewing and contemplating the wonderful works of God, admiring the wisdom of his providence, adoring his infinite love to the sons of men, reflecting on our own inexpressible happiness, and singing everlasting hymns of praise, joy and triumph to God, and our Lord Jesus Christ, for vouchsafing all these blessings. It is to dwell for ever in a place, where no objects of pity or compassion, of anger or envy, of hatred or distrust, are to be found; but where all will encrease the happiness of each other, by mutual love and kindness. It is to converse with the most delightful company, to be restored to the society of our dear friends and relations, who died in the faith of Christ. Lastly, it is to be with Jesus Christ, to behold his glory, to live for ever in seeing and enjoying the great God, in whose presence is fulness of joy, and at whose right hand are pleasures for evermore. This is the salvation that Christ hath purchased for us; this the salvation his gospel offers to all mankind. And have we not great reason to say with the Apostle, *how shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation?*

For let us suppose a person convicted of notorious crimes, and sentenced to death, and that through the powerful intercession of the prince with his father, this condemned malefactor was not only offered

ferred a pardon, but to be preferred and have his sovereign's favour; and yet so obstinate is he, as perversely to reject these kind overtures, and to chuse rather to die miserably than live happily. Would not this be a most unaccountable madness? and who would pity one, so stupid and foolish, as to act thus against sense and reason? And yet this is the case of most men; for by reason of our manifold offences against Heaven, we are in a worse condition, than this supposed condemned malefactor: since his punishment is only temporal death; but death eternal, with all the dreadful consequences of it, are the deserved wages, the just recompence of our transgressions. But so infinitely kind is God to us, that through the mediation of his son Jesus, he will not take advantage of our weakness, but offers us a pardon for all our sins, and his love and favour, which is better than life itself. He offers to make us children of the Most High, and heirs of an eternal kingdom, of a crown of glory that fadeth not away. And is it not the utmost stupidity, for us not to embrace these gracious tenders; but to be so in love with sin and misery, as to despise the bliss and happiness of Heaven? How amazing is it, that God, who is so rich in mercy, so abundant in love, as to offer the inestimable treasures of his grace and favour to every human creature, and yet that most of us should be so wretchedly foolish, as to slight and disregard them? that the painted bubbles of this present world, should so captivate and allure us, as to make us undervalue those sublime glories, that are of eternal duration. O the base and degenerate spirits of mankind! that they should patiently become slaves and vassals to diverse lusts, rather than enjoy the most glorious liberty of the sons of God. That they should spend their days in vanity and emptiness, folly and misery, fanciful satisfactions and real sorrows, and at last find nothing but anguish, misery and confusion for ever; when they might live happily in this life, and become hereafter the most noble and glorious beings, that words can express, or the mind of man conceive. Would we therefore seriously reflect, and calmly meditate on these things, we could not possibly live as we now do. It would be too hard for human nature to withstand

such arguments, did we vigorously apply them to our mind.

If we did heartily believe, and seriously consider what the present life is, and what will become of us hereafter; if we did sedately weigh the infinite disproportion, between a moment and eternity; what a mere trifle would even the greatest business, the most delightful enjoyments, the sharpest sufferings, in reality appear, when compared to that eternal weight of glory, or that everlasting shame and confusion of face, that will be hereafter? And did we in good earnest attend to these things, we should find a sudden alteration in ourselves; new thoughts and desires, new designs and resolutions would then readily spring up, and arise in our minds. And our greatest endeavours would be, to be happy in the next world, whatever becomes of us in this. And were our minds once seriously affected with these things, all the pleasures, riches, honours, and allurements of this world, which are so apt to ensnare and captivate us, would appear, as they really are, mean and contemptible. Did we seriously meditate on these things, what noble thoughts and resolutions would the hopes of living for ever in eternal glory, inspire us with? how regular would it make us in all our conversation? how diligent in mortifying our lusts and evil habits? how strict and solemn, in the exercise of devotion? how serious and constant in the profession of Christ's religion? and how solicitous to keep a good conscience, and to do nothing inconsistent with our duty? Having thus observed some of those great benefits of our salvation, which Christ has procured for us; it will be very proper also to consider, the many and great encouragements, which we have afforded us, to endeavour after the obtaining of it.

The encouragements given us by God, for procuring our salvation, will appear from the easy terms, on which it is offered; namely, God's readiness to accept the greatest sinners, if they will seek after this salvation, and the mighty helps and assistances which he affords for the obtaining it. Indeed God, when he proposes salvation to us in the gospel, deals with us, as a master does by his servants; we must do some work, before we have our wages: (if salvation can be

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called wages, or not rather the gracious bounty of God); but as we are bid to work out our salvation, some services are expected to be performed on our part, before we can enter into our master's joy. But then so infinitely kind a master have we; so noble, so rational, so delightful a service doth he require of us; that the very easiness of the terms, will be one great aggravation of our base and inexcusable guilt, if we slight and condemn a salvation so easy and reasonable.

If the conditions proposed to us, had been like those mentioned by the prophet, where a man is represented thus to speak, *Wherewith shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before the Most High? will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, or ten thousand rivers of oil? or shall I give my first-born for my transgressions, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?* I say, were these the terms of recommending ourselves to God's favour, we might have reason enough to complain of the severity of them; and to urge that as an excuse for not endeavouring after it. But when the Lord only requires us, to do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with our God, which is our case; what excuse can be made for those who will neglect a salvation, that may be so easily attained? certain it is, that the terms of our future happiness, as proposed by our Saviour, are in themselves most agreeable to the make and frame of our nature, highly conducive to the improvement and perfection of our faculties, and very necessary even to our temporal felicity; had there been no promise annexed to them, of an eternal reward. And can we then think it severe treatment, to have all the glories of heaven offered us, upon such conditions as these; namely, that we live up to the dignity of our nature, lead the life of men, and not of brute beasts; that we endeavour to make our abode here as happy as we can, by the practice of virtue and righteousness? These are the terms of salvation offered by the gospel to mankind. And what severity is there in all this? but, alas! the perverseness of sinful men, who might be happy in this world by the practice of virtue, and obtain the happiness of heaven, did they not for a few fading transitory pleasures, despise and neglect it, at the hazard of eternal misery. For let me enquire of

any person, whether we can possibly lay a surer foundation for ease and peace, and the enjoyment of ourselves, in all states and conditions of life, than to have a hearty sense of God's presence and goodness? than to love him, who is the most amiable object; to believe his revelation, who is truth itself; to depend on him in our necessities, and be truly thankful for all his kindness and bounty: to procure to ourselves as many friends, and as few enemies as possible, by being true and faithful, just and honest, meek and patient, kind and charitable; to live in a moderate, sober use of the good things of this life; to keep our passions and appetites within due bounds, so as not to injure our health, nor disturb the ease and quiet of our minds; but to govern ourselves and all our actions, by the law and rule of right reason. And what can be more natural and delightful, or more contribute to a comfortable and happy life in this world, than the practice of these things? And yet these are the only severe terms imposed on us by Christ, which so terribly frighten us from pursuing that everlasting salvation he has offered to us in the gospel.

But it will be urged in answer to all this, that repentance, mortification, and disengaging ourselves from vicious habits, which must be done, in order to our salvation, are not such pleasant and delightful things, but very uneasy and troublesome; and let me say, so is physic to a sick man: and yet when it has performed its operation, then joy and health succeed, to the great pleasure and satisfaction of the person. Besides, the difficulty or uneasiness of these duties do not last long; and even during the time of trial, a man's life is much more easy and comfortable, than while he was a slave to his lusts, and perpetually tormented with an evil conscience. Whoever has tried this, as no doubt many have, will acknowledge the truth thereof. For the religion, whose severities are the greatest at first, yields afterwards more peace, happiness, and satisfaction, than can be found in a wicked, sensual, and vicious course of life. So that the terms on which Christ hath promised this great salvation, appear to be so highly reasonable, so exceeding easy, that there is no excuse left for that man, who is so careless and

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remiss, as to neglect it; especially if we consider how universally it is offered. And

It is tendered most seriously and affectionately to all sorts of men; even to the greatest sinners. How bad soever our lives have formerly been, or how much soever our consciences are oppressed with the guilt of sin; yet if we comply with our Saviour's terms, he is ready to bestow his salvation upon us. The consideration of this, as it gives us the greatest encouragement to endeavour after it, so if we do not, we shall be still more culpable. For how shall we escape, if we neglect a salvation, which is tendered so freely, so unreservedly, to all sinners, without exception? A sense of guilt often makes men more guilty; despair of mercy often stops the way to amendment, and carries men on to more wicked and desperate courses. But to have hopes, nay assurance of mercy and forgiveness, should produce quite other effects. For the great God to proclaim his general pardon to all his rebellious creatures; to entreat and beseech them to accept of it, promising his favour and eternal life to all who repent, surely this kind usage should melt any ingenuous mind into the most willing and hearty submission. He must certainly be a most hardened wretch, whom so much goodness will not move to repentance, and to be reconciled to his God, and tender-hearted father. If we consider the surprising, unexpected mercy, that is offered in the Gospel to the worst of sinners, how ought it to affect us? how should it rouse in the most stupid and insensible a desire of returning to their gracious God, from whom they have so long departed? For not only the righteous and innocent shall have benefit by the blood of Christ:—those, who through a good education, and virtuous dispositions, have in a great measure escaped the pollutions of the world, and given up their whole life to the service of Jesus Christ; it is not to these only, that the mercies of the gospel are extended, but heaven's gate is open, even to the *prodigal children*, to *those who have wasted all their father's substance, in lewdness and riotous living*; even these our heavenly father is ready to receive with open arms, if they will but return to him. Let all such then, hearken to this

and consider it, who have been remiss and careless in their duty; who have never minded God and his religion, but have solely pursued a course of vice, sensuality, and wickedness, all their life; who have given the reins to their brutish passions and appetites, and with a high hand affronted and provoked the Almighty, by their repeated transgressions. And yet, as bad as such are, their case is not desperate, if they will repent. The God of heaven waits for, and is ready to receive and embrace them. For such Christ Jesus shed his precious blood. He begs and intreats them to come and partake of the benefits thereof. The angels of God wish for their conversion, and at the news of it, there will be joy in heaven. All this the gospel gives authority to publish and declare. *Let me therefore in Christ's stead beseech all, to be reconciled to God.* It is not too late, all may be everlastingly happy, if they will consider and turn from their evil ways. Christ yet offers them his salvation. The Lord himself speaks to such, saying, *Wash you, make you clean, put away the evil of your doings from before my eyes; cease to do evil, learn to do well; and then, though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall be as wool.* Having then these kind invitations, these reviving hopes, these assurances of God's mercy; why should we be any longer wicked? why should we not presently resolve to leave our sins, and go to our gracious God, who so lovingly calls us to his mercy, to his favour, to our own everlasting salvation? But if after all these astonishing overtures of grace and goodness, any will harden their hearts, and neglect this great salvation; let such themselves judge, whether they deserve any favour, pity, or compassion, when they most stand in need of it? Alas! it will be a stinging consideration one day, to think of the greatness of that mercy which such now reject; to think *how often God called them, but they refused*; how often he stretched forth his hand, to have kept them from destruction, but they would not regard him; how often *he would have gathered them to him, as a hen her chickens under her wings, but they would not.* They will then sadly wish, that they had in time understood the things

things which belong to their peace; but it will be too late, they will then be hid from their eyes. Again,

Our neglect of Christ's salvation will yet farther appear most criminal and inexcusable, if we consider the encouragement given us, by the great assistance God is ready to afford us for obtaining it. Indeed, the sensual and careless, notwithstanding what has been represented, will be apt to take refuge, and say, what though heaven be a glorious place, and the way plainly enough described, yet the journey is very long, and we must expect to meet with many difficulties: and however easy and reasonable the course of life leading to it, is represented, yet we find by our own experience, that it is very hard for flesh and blood to live so regular and exact. The temptations to sin are every where so many and powerful, and our own strength to resist them so little and inconsiderable, that we know not how to undertake such an affair. But, alas! how vain are these pretences and suggestions. As if we had no supports against these discouragements, and that the work of our salvation was left entirely to our own strength. Whereas, if we will but apply to our blessed Saviour for his gracious aid and assistance, were the difficulties we are to conflict with, much more considerable than they are, yet they deserve not to be named, being so exceedingly overbalanced by those divine powers and aids, which God will supply us with, if we seriously engage in this work. Christ Jesus hath not only purchased a kingdom for us, and instructed us in the way to it, but he hath procured the Holy Spirit to be our continual assistant and guide thither. He hath not only given us a most excellent glorious example, and bid us follow him; but he hath sent the Holy Ghost, as his vicergerent on earth, to conduct us to the blessed place where he is. We have the grace of God always ready, if we seriously pray for it, to strengthen our weakness, to assist our endeavours, to enlighten our minds, to fortify our wills, to excite our affections, to support us under all temptations; provided we are sincere and honest, in the prosecution of that glorious warfare, whereunto we are called. What can we desire more than this? God hath promised, *that he will never leave nor forsake us; that nothing shall be*

able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus; neither life, nor death, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature. Nothing under heaven, but ourselves, can do us any mischief.

This being our case, what must be said of us, if we be not virtuous and happy? how shall we think to escape, if we neglect a salvation, for the obtaining of which we have such mighty succours and assistances afforded? Let then these considerations fire us into brave and worthy thoughts; let us make no more vain excuses, no longer pretend we know not what difficulties; but let us cheerfully and resolutely apply ourselves to the working of our salvation; knowing, that *as it is God that worketh in us the will, so the same God will also work in us the power of doing it.* We have no reason to be afraid or discouraged at any thing. For almighty God is with us, he that made us still takes care of us; and is ever ready to assist all his faithful servants, in their greatest extremities. Christ Jesus our high priest sits at the right hand of God, and continually makes intercession for us. The Holy Spirit never fails to afford his presence in the souls of well disposed persons, to carry them through all dangers, difficulties, and temptations. In a word, we need not fear of succeeding, if we do but design, resolve, and endeavour to do our duty to God and man.

S E R M O N XXV.

By Dr. BARROW.

The Christian, the Pagan, the Mahometan, and the Jewish Religions compared.

Ephes. i. 13.

In whom ye also trusted, having heard the word of truth, the gospel of our salvation.

IN these words, and in many other places of scripture, the Christian doctrine is called *the word of truth*, and *the gospel of salvation*. That is, a most true doctrine, or message brought down from heaven by our Saviour and his Apostles;

in which, the way and means of attaining salvation, the overtures thereof made by God, and the conditions from us, are fully declared.

But previous to my shewing the reason we have to embrace this word or doctrine of truth, it may be proper to observe, that Christianity does not require a bare groundless faith, or debar men from the use of reason, and enjoin them to believe without examining the reason and truth of its doctrines. For never did any religion so freely expose itself to a fair trial at the bar of reason, nor so earnestly invite men to consider and examine what it proposes; leaving it to the verdict of that reason and conscience, with which God hath endued every man. This is farther evident from the nature of that faith it requires. Christianity represents faith as a great virtue, and therefore supposes it to be both voluntary and reasonable. It promiseth ample rewards thereto, which proves it to be a work of care and industry, and not necessity. It declares infidelity to be very sinful, and threatens severely to punish it, because it implies great perverseness or neglect of reason, Christianity compels no man by force to believe it, but fairly persuades him by reason to embrace it. The religion of Christ doth not prohibit, but earnestly recommends examination, to find out the truth: nor does it disclaim the judgment of reason, but readily appeals to it. *Examine all things, but hold fast that which is good. Believe not every spirit, but try whether it be of God. Let no man deceive you, but be always ready, with meekness and respect, to give to every one, a reason of the hope that is in you.* These are the maxims by which Christianity propagates and maintains itself.

The first principle of Christianity, common to all religions, is the belief of a God, a Being of all perfection, the Maker and Governor of all things. The second is, that God is perfectly true. The third is, that God is the author of the Christian doctrine, or law; that he hath revealed it to mankind, and confirmed it by his testimony. This last principle not being immediately evident in itself, but arising from a matter of fact, it requires a rational proof, in order to produce in us conviction, and a solid persuasion of mind. And that we believe this truth like reasonable men, and not as Pagans

and Mahometants do their religion, by wilful resolution, or mere chance, I shall endeavour to make appear. And first, it is reasonable to suppose, that God should, at some certain time, clearly and fully reveal unto men such truths as concern his nature and will, and our state and particularly duty. For experience assures us, that natural light is insufficient to direct mankind, it leaving them under great ignorance and uncertainty, exposing men to such vices as were very dishonourable, hurtful, and destructive to their nature, and to all those miseries which naturally spring from ignorance and error, vice and wickedness; which render them incapable of his love and favour. Not only the generality of men did some time lie in this sad condition, but the most elevated and refined wits, even those who by the improvement of their reason, endeavoured to raise themselves from this low state, to rescue their minds from the common ignorance, mistakes, superstitions, and follies of the world, could not in any good measure attain those ends. For what did their earnest enquiries and restless studies produce, but dissatisfaction and perplexity of mind? In what did their eager disputes terminate, but in irreconcilable differences of opinion, and greater uncertainties than before? none could attain to more than faint conjectures concerning points of the highest moment, so as to produce in them a practice suitable to the dignity of man's nature, to his duty to God, and the capacity he hath of receiving good, and doing much benefit to man. Their reasonings and disputes were vain, and their foolish hearts so darkened, that with all their light, they could not clearly discern what much concerned them to know. The world by all the wisdom it could get did not know God, so as to glorify and thank him for his benefits, and to bring forth fruits worthy of piety and virtue. This St. Paul not only observed of them, but even they themselves greatly complain of the blindness of their minds, of the obscurity and uncertainty of things, of the insuperable difficulty of finding truth, and of the miserable consequences which from thence occur.

This being the natural state of men, destitute of divine conduct and assistance; how greatly must they want some other light to guide or bring them out of this darkness; some kind hand to free them from

from these inconveniencies ! And is it not reasonable to suppose, that God, who is not only able, but willing, should in due time afford it ? He, who in nature is most kind and bountiful, whose goodness fills the earth, and whose mercy is over all his works ; he, who bears to man, the relation, tenderness, affection, and goodwill of a father ; he, whose attributes engage him to this performance, not only his goodness to excite, and his wisdom to direct him, but his justice also obliging him thereto. God, whose goodness is immutable, will be ever mindful of, and compassionate to his children. His gracious ear cannot hear mankind dolefully groaning under bitter oppressions, his pitiful eye cannot behold the flower of his creation, lying in so distressed and comfortless a state, without feeling some pity, and affording some relief. For can we suppose him, who is goodness itself ; he, who hath so amply provided for the needs, conveniencies, and pleasures of the body, should take so little care of our better part the soul, as to neglect and let it want spiritual sustenance ? We cannot with any reason imagine, that God's good providence should be defective in so main and principal a part. And as his goodness strongly confirms the supposition, so does his wisdom enforce the same. God made the world to express his goodness, and display his glory ; but who can be sensible of his goodness, who perceive and promote his glory, but man ? who, but he, that is endued with reason, which enables him to reflect on the good he feels, to admire the excellency he discovers, to render grateful acknowledgements for the one, and acclamations of praise for the other ? But this would in great measure be frustrated, should God for ever suffer men to continue in ignorance, doubt, or mistake, concerning himself. Unless men are fully persuaded that he made and governs the world, how can they pay homage to his glorious power, admire his excellent wisdom, or love his transcendent goodness ? Reason tells us, that God would have men act in the best manner they can ; that he would have their affairs prosper ; that he earnestly desires their goodness, and delights in their happiness : and if so, it is reasonable to suppose, that God in his wisdom would appoint means fit to accomplish his ends ; that he should impart to men

a competent knowledge of himself ; that he should reveal and declare his good-will and pleasure to them, as to the best way of serving him, and of attaining their own happiness. And as God's goodness and wisdom are arguments in favour of a divine revelation, so is his justice. For every good governor thinks it just to take care, that his subjects should know his will, and be acquainted with his laws ; and to excite their obedience, he offers fit rewards ; to deter from offending, he threatens proper punishments ; knowing that man's nature requires such inducement. And is it reasonable to suppose, that the sovereign Governor and Judge of all the world, should observe less equity in his administration ; that he should neglect any necessary means to promote the performance of his subject's duty, or prevent the breaches of his laws ? He who so perfectly loves righteousness, so earnestly desires to be carefully obeyed, so infinitely delights in his subject's good ; will he not sufficiently declare his mind, as well to encourage men to comply with his will, as to prevent them from transgressing it ? Will he suffer his laws to remain unknown or uncertain, or so disregard the infirmities of his subjects, as to leave them some excuse for their disobedience ? To suppose this, is contrary to the perfect justice, as well as goodness and wisdom of God.

Indeed, we cannot judge or determine the particular circumstances and limits of God's dealing with men in this respect ; as to the time when, the manner how, and the measure according to which, God will dispense such revelations of himself : these depending on the counsel of infinite wisdom, which far surpasses our comprehension. That God should for a while connive at men's ignorance, and suffer them to grope after divine truth ; that he should try how they would behave in that state, and use their talent of natural light ; in order to convince them of their ignorance, to shew them from whence, and on whom, all their happiness depends ; to make them more able to value, more desirous to embrace a revelation which would afford them relief, under their miserable circumstances ; as also to demonstrate his own great clemency, long-suffering, and patience : I say, that God for such reasons, or others not to be comprehended by our finite understand-

ings, should not for some time fully declare all his mind to men, is not strange or improbable. But that he should for ever leave men in such depth of ignorance, and perplexity of doubt, is no way likely or probable; nor is it in reason, contrary to the goodness, wisdom, or justice of God, for him clearly to discover what duty he requires from us, or good intends us; what way leads to our happiness, and how we may avoid misery. This consideration, if it does not certainly prove that God cannot but some time or other make such a revelation, or hath actually done it; yet it should dispose us readily to admit other arguments that will be urged: for it not being improbable, but according to the reason of the thing likely or very probable, that God may thus act; this may make us more attentively regard whatever is offered to demonstrate the truth of it. Which leads me, in the next place, to prove, that no other revelation of such importance hath been made, and that no religion which ever yet appeared, can with so much probability claim God for its author; so as to be a general, perpetual, and complete instruction to mankind. There are indeed three that have pretended thereto, namely, Paganism, Mahometanism, and Judaism; each of these I shall briefly examine, and endeavour to prove that their pretensions are very ill grounded.

As to Paganism, though it pretends to a kind of revelation, yet it never did nor could pretend to any one uniform revelation from God, solemnly delivered, and directed to all mankind: which shews that such pretended revelations not only were imperfect and insufficient to the ends proposed, but also false and counterfeit. If we take a short view of the Pagan religion, we shall find it nothing but a mixture of inconsistency, obscenity, vanity, and folly; little tending to the honour of God, or the good of men; to the promoting virtue and goodness; to the maintaining justice, peace, love, and good order among men; but rather tending to produce the contrary effects. If we survey it throughout, we shall find it full of idle, ill-contrived, and incredible stories; void of truth or sincerity, wit or discretion; attended with practices foolish, lewd, and cruel; unworthy of human nature, contrary to common sense and honesty. Their worship directed to very

unsuitable improper objects; to the spirits of dead men, who in their life-time were vilely enormous, guilty of thefts and rapines, murders and parricides, of horrid lusts, adulteries, rapes, and incest: Persons, that good and wise men would rather hate and despise, than respect and worship. Nay, they worshipped the vilest of brute beasts, dogs, serpents, and crocodiles; also inanimate creatures; the stars and elements, rivers and trees; they dedicated temples, and offered sacrifices to things void of substance, even to the passions of our mind, the diseases of our body, and the accidents of our lives; to adore and pay veneration to all which, must argue a very abject and puerile mind. To such objects as these they paid their respect and devotion, in them they reposed their confidence. And is it likely such a religion should proceed from God, or that it can produce glory to him, or benefit to man? What piety towards God; what justice, truth, or goodness toward men; what sobriety, purity, or morality, can we expect from such principles and practices?

But it is needless to argue against that which no reasonable wise man did ever seriously think had any truth or reality in it. Plato often condemns those foolish fables in Heathen theology, on which the whole œconomy of their religious practices depended. Aristotle attributes the foundation of their religion to statesmen. None of the fathers did ever more earnestly dispute against and oppose Heathenism than Pliny. Most of the philosophers expressed a great dislike and contempt of the vulgar religious opinions and practices. What Cicero saith of one part, the wiser sort did judge of all; "the whole was deceitfully forged, either for gain, or out of superstition, or from mistake." Enough then has been said, to prove that Paganism did not proceed from divine revelation; but from human invention and wicked suggestion; and from hence appears the great necessity of some full and plain revelation of God's mind and will, in order to promote his glory, and the good of man; as also to discover our great obligations to bless and thank God for his great mercy to us in revealing his divine will, and freeing us from deplorable errors and mischiefs.

I now proceed to examine the Mahometan religion, raised up since Ch

ty became known; which in respect to its age and the character it bears, demands some consideration; it having continued a long time, and vastly overspread the world. But if we examine the substance and circumstances of it, the quality of the instruments by whom, with the times when, it was introduced; the places where, the people who received it; the manner of its rise, progress, and continuance; as also the matter it teaches and enjoins: we shall perceive in it no genuine characters of a divine original, but really find it to be a most wicked contrivance, a lewd and impudent imposition on mankind. In time of great confusion, when barbarous nations overspread the world; when a general corruption among Christians, even ignorance and superstition, dissension and uncharitableness, impiety and great wickedness did notoriously prevail; then, in an obscure corner of the earth, among a crew of thieves and profligate fellows (as all those Arabians were) had this sect its rise and birth. Upon this fierce and savage people was this religion, (indeed well accommodated to their humour and genius) by juggling tricks, and seditious violence, imposed and obtruded. The first author of it, according to the truest account, was a person who had all the marks of an impostor; being inhuman and cruel, lewd and lascivious; of a base education, turbulent disposition, and vicious life; pretending to the power of performing such wonders, as were in their nature absurd and incredible, useless and vain. At such a season, by such methods, and by such a person, assisted by some like himself, was this religion first planted. And as to the propagation thereof, it had the advantage of falling in the way of people void of learning and civility, destitute of any true notions or sense of religion; and it diffused itself by rage and terror of arms, convincing men by the sword, and using no other arguments than force. On the same grounds it still subsists, rejecting reason, refusing examination, and forbidding any dispute about its truth, under severe penalties; fearing, no doubt, that a moderate liberty of discussing its pretences would easily overthrow it.

But that divine wisdom should make choice of one (so dissolute in life) from the deserts of Arabia, and order his laws

to be published to a mere rabble of vile and abandoned wretches, is a way of proceeding that cannot possibly be imputed to divine wisdom. So that if we consider the nature of the rise, growth, and continuance of Mahometanism, it is a strong presumption against its divinity, and plainly demonstrates it could not come from God; whose truth needs not such instruments and methods, and whose goodness abhors them. And if we look into the matter and mixed frame of it, we shall find it a mass of absurd opinions, odd stories, ridiculous ceremonies; compounded of the dregs of Christian heresies, with some ingredients of Judaism, and Paganism, confusedly jumbled and mixed together. From Christian heresies it has derived several doctrines opposite to Christianity. For instance; that of denying Christ's being the Son of God, and that he did really suffer; the believing that unreasonable opinion so contrary to God's nature, that God hath a body, and which Mahomet pretended he once felt, and found it very cold. Their doctrine concerning the fatal determination of all events, so prejudicial to all religion, they probably borrowed from the Manichees, a sect that much obtained in those eastern parts. From the Jews they took circumcision, frequent purgations by water, abstinence from swine's flesh, the allowance of polygamy and divorce; and perhaps also the monopolizing of divine favour to themselves, and of restraining all kindnesses and respect to those of their own sect and profession; not only condemning, despising, and hating all others, whom they adjudge to certain damnation; but affirming that all of their belief, how wicked soever they live, shall assuredly partake of salvation. And as to their notion of God, his attributes and providence, it is most unworthy of and repugnant to his nature. Their descriptions of a future state, which is the principal part of their religion, from whence is it to be deduced, but from the Pagan stories of Elysium and Hades? Where otherwise can we trace that paradise of corporeal delight, of brutish sensuality, so much countenanced by their religion; and yet, so contrary to reason and honesty, so unworthy of any virtuous reward? who, unless he is very stupid, or much inclined to indulge his pleasure, and gratify his sensual

fual appetites, can suffer himself to be persuaded, that such a religion can come from the God of wisdom and holiness? And as to Mahomet's being inspired, there is nothing to support it, but stories patched up of old histories, corrupted and interspersed with fabulous legends, contrary to all probable records of history, and very repugnant to the nature and possibility of things. The same may be said concerning its multitude of silly ceremonies, founded on no reasonable design, subservient to no purpose of virtue, the institution whereof cannot, without great injury, be imputed to divine wisdom. And though in their religion there are some precepts of justice and charity, yet it may reasonably be supposed, that these are taken from Christianity, which is much the older. Thus have I sufficiently demonstrated, that neither the Pagan nor Mahometan religion is of divine extraction. I shall now proceed to examine the pretensions of Judaism.

It must be acknowledged, that the Jewish religion was originally revealed by God; but though we question not its truth and goodness, yet upon due enquiry we shall find it to be in many respects defective. For it was not universal, neither directed to, nor designed for the nature and wants of all mankind; nor yet so full and complete as to be of perpetual obligation. That this revelation was not general, nor intended to instruct and oblige all mankind; but peculiarly designed for that small nation of the Jews, which possessed a very inconsiderable part of the earth, appears by express passages in their law and writings, *God shewed his word unto Jacob, his statutes and judgments unto Israel; he hath not dealt so with any nation. I the Lord am holy, and have severed you from other people, that ye shall be mine; even from all the people that are upon the face of the earth.* And saith Moses to the Jews, *thou art a holy people, whom the Lord hath chosen unto himself, as a peculiar people, above all that are on earth.* Their religious constitution is frequently styled a covenant, made, not between God and mankind, but between God and that single nation; a covenant in formal terms mentioning them only; sealed with marks and characters peculiar to them, requiring conditions and duties only possible or proper for them to perform; promising re-

wards which they only could receive, and threatening punishments, which they only could undergo. *Hear, O Israel,* is the usual style to whom those laws are directed. *I am the Lord thy God, which brought thee out of the land of Egypt,* is the introduction to the decalogue or ten commandments, which, of all their laws, is of the most general importance and obligation; and yet this is peculiarly called the covenant between God and that people. In their laws a distinction is made between those who were bound to observe it, and such as were not; between brethren and strangers, Hebrews and aliens; and different duties were required from each: such as observation of feasts, in commemoration and thankfulness for mercies vouchsafed to their nation; that of repairing thrice a year to a certain place, for God's worship; of bringing tithes and oblations thither; of the great number of priests and levites appointed for God's service; of a long and prosperous enjoyment of the land of Canaan.

The laws and privileges of this religion were also only designed for this people; for as they did only agree to their circumstances, were directly adapted to their perverse inclinations, and low capacities, so were they repugnant to the common humour and genius of mankind. By all which considerations, it evidently appears, that this dispensation was not, in its nature and design, general, or such as respected all mankind, but limited and restrained to the use of one place and people, both small and inconsiderable. It is not therefore in reason to be taken for such a revelation, as might be expected from him, who is good to all, and whose tender mercies are over all his works; from him, who is the common father of all, having made of one blood the whole nation and commonwealth of mankind; from him, who is not only the maker, but saviour of all men, he being desirous that all men should be saved, and come to the knowledge of the truth; not willing that any should perish, but that all men should come to repentance; from him who is not only a lover of Jews and Greeks, but a lover of all men, for he is not the God of the Jews only, but of the Gentiles also. From this God, so inclined and disposed to regard us, so impartial in his affection, so unlimited in his bounty,

bounty, we have more reason to expect no revelation at all, than one confined within such narrow bounds; so disproportioned to the glory, which is due to God, and to the necessities of mankind. This revelation therefore was not in this respect sufficient, not being general and universal.

And as this revelation was particular, and that God did not therein speak his mind to all, so it was partial and imperfect, for he did not declare all his will. *If the first covenant had been faultless, faith the apostle, then should no place have been sought for the second. The law made nothing perfect.* This will easily appear if we consider both parts thereof, that which directs, and the other which excites to practice. As to the directive part, we may observe a redundancy in things circumstantial, and a great defect in things substantial; a vast number of ritual institutions appointed and exactly required: such as the observing times and places, the distinction of meats and habits, (of which they were not to touch, taste, or handle;) corporeal cleansings and purgations, sacrifices and oblations; these were prescribed and enjoined under heavy penalties; while the moral duties of justice and charity, temperance and sobriety, and true spiritual devotion, (which is much more agreeable to our rational nature, and more pleasing to God,) were neither clearly explained, nor much insisted on, nor yet enforced with rational arguments, or suitable rewards. Many things, which even natural reason dislikes or condemns, were permitted or connived at; as polygamy and divorce, some degrees of revenge and uncharitableness. Thus faulty and defective was that dispensation, in matters directive of life; and it was the same in what concerns good practice. Nothing so much hinders our cheerful endeavours as despair, or diffidence of success; nothing more excites them, than a reasonable presumption thereof. But how could they earnestly endeavour to please God, who were not assured of, but had reason to distrust God's placability and readiness, upon repentance, to forgive wilful presumptuous sinners; and if the not opening a door of mercy seems discouraging, and tends to prevent the performance of duty; what then must this severe threatening be;

curst is he that abides not in all things written in the law to do them? This was enough to exclude assurance and the hopes of mercy, to extinguish all care and industry in serving God. Nor were the rewards promised to obedience such as the reason of things doth afford and require. They were only temporal and chiefly sensible, such as concerned the outward state of this transitory life; which neither deserve much regard, nor are of any great efficacy. For who will, or in reason should, highly value the accommodations of this short uncertain life? or be greatly terrified with the inconveniencies thereof? Such considerations cannot sufficiently animate men to encounter and sustain the perils, difficulties, troubles, and disgraces, to which the practice of virtue is often exposed; nor guard them from the enchantments of pleasure, profit, and honour, which are apt to allure us to sin. For how improper an encouragement are the pleasures of sense, how unworthy a recompence these, for the labour and achievements of virtue? Incomparably better, more worthy of regard, more apt to produce real virtue and sincere piety, are the rewards concerning the future state of our immortal soul; and yet this is what the Jewish law doth scarce ever mention, at least not plainly and clearly. Indeed, the Pagan priests more expressly taught, and more frequently inculcated the belief of the immortality of man's soul, or a future state, than the Hebrew prophets; a plain instance and strong argument this of the imperfection of the Jewish religion.

Another main defect in that religion was, that it represented the obligation and difficulty of our duty, with the danger of transgressing it, but did not propose the requisite means of performing it. Well therefore might St. Paul call this dispensation, *a ministry of death and condemnation, a subjection to a curse, a killing letter.*

But I would not, by reasoning thus, lay any imputation on God, the author of that religion; the making so imperfect a revelation being in no respect disagreeable to his wisdom, goodness, or justice: since as God might for a time, very consistent with infinite wisdom, withhold the declaration of his mind to all mankind; so

so likewise might he forbear to declare some part thereof to his people the Jews: there appearing no particular reason that could oblige or induce him to act otherwise; nay, some good reason may be assigned, why God should not discover fully his nature and pleasure to them, and why he laid so much stress on carnal ceremonious observances, without requiring more of spiritual duty and worship: perhaps, a dawning of light better suited that morning of times, than a meridian brightness; or that infancy of the world might not be full ripe for a more deep and perfect instruction; or, that nation, for whom those laws and institutions were adapted, was not capable to bear the highest and hardest lessons. For scripture assures us, the Jews were a nation not wise or considerate, but a very stupid and heady, froward and stubborn generation of men. *They were people void of counsel and understanding; an obstinate and stiff-necked people.* The divine wisdom and goodness was therefore pleased to deal with them as such; dispensing with their infirmities, condescending to their weak capacities, feeding them with milk, and so tempering his ordinances, as might best serve to keep them in good humour; to draw and entice them to somewhat good, to curb and restrain them from evil. Hence, the apostle calls those institutions *poor and mean elements of the world; rudiments of knowledge and discipline*; suited to the capacity of the first age and meanest rank, such as vulgar and silly people were able to learn and practise.

This dispensation was also adapted to the slavish spirit of that people, who having little ingenuity or inclination to do good, would have grown sturdy and insolent, had they not been kept under and inured to something of burthen and toil. God therefore dealt according to wisdom with the Jews, when he imposed such burdens on their shoulders, burdens intolerably heavy and troublesome; and to be loosed therefrom, is an invaluable privilege and benefit purchased by our Saviour for us. So that such a dispensation was not fit for the rational nature in common, nor could God be satisfied with such mean performances. From whence it appears, that this revelation was in many respects partial and imperfect.

Indeed God did afterwards impart, by degrees, farther manifestations of his light and grace to that people, by the instructions and exemplary practices of prophets and holy men, whom he raised up on extraordinary occasions. The prophets frequently declared, that God delighted not in those ceremonious observances, nor would accept of them, unless accompanied with practices of morality and spiritual piety; that he chiefly required of them humble reverence to himself, and submission to his will; strict justice and tender charity towards their neighbours; meekness and patience in their behaviour, temperance and sobriety in all their conversation. God also through them discovered more of his gracious disposition, and merciful intentions towards men; as that he would not be extremely rigorous in punishing the transgressors of his laws, nor remain irreconcilable towards the most heinous offenders, but was ready to pardon the greatest sinners, on sincere repentance and amendment of life; that he loved a purer devotion, a perfecter righteousness, a more extensive charity, than the letter of the Jewish law prescribed; and that he not only required such duties, but was willing to assist men in the performance thereof, by teaching and admonishing them, enlightening their minds, enflaming their affections, directing and exciting them to obedience. But though that morning of divine knowledge did, by degrees, encrease, yet the whole of God's will was not then disclosed. All which considerations plainly evince, that God did not intend the Jewish law for a complete discovery of his mind, since we find, that a future state, and immortality itself, was not fully declared by the prophets; that the better covenant, established upon better assurances, was not yet revealed; that all means requisite for the glory of God, and the good of men, were not then thoroughly provided for.

Let me add, that Judaism did not sufficiently tend to dispose men's minds to any tolerable degree of true sanctity, piety, and righteousness of life.

What do their prophetic writings contain besides pathetical expostulations, severe reproofs, dreadful threatening of judgment upon them, for their prodigious impieties and iniquities. They are called,

called, a sinful nation, a people laden with iniquities, a seed of evil-doers; the land was defiled with the inhabitants thereof; from the sole of the foot even to the head, there was no soundness in the body of that nation. They were corrupt and did abominable works; there was none that did good, no not one. The law, though inculcated and urged upon them with the greatest vehemence and diligence, continually proved ineffectual to produce the fruits of piety and righteousness; and therefore God in his providence, designed that this law should be laid aside, as being unfit, either to serve his glory, or promote the good of men.

Such a dispensation, however good for those times and persons, is very unfit now, when philosophy, learning, and higher improvements of reason have a more general influence over the minds of men, to relish and digest a more perfect institution.

Lastly, as the Jewish religion was particular in respect to the persons to whom it was directed and did oblige, as it was partial and incomplete in its frame, so was it to be temporary and mutable. This conclusion may be inferred from its small extent and intrinsic imperfection. For supposing a new general and perfect revelation made to mankind, such as the Christian, and which we have proved to be probable; as this comprehends and also supplies the defects of all former ones, it must needs render all others useless.

But this may be more convincingly demonstrated, by those many intimations, and express predictions which God has afforded us, that he designed in due time to make a great change in affairs of this kind, to refine and reform the state of things, to enlarge the bounds of his dominion, and receive all nations into his love and favour; by dispensing a general, full revelation of his mind, grace, and good-will, to mankind. Thus the holy writings of these people acquaint us, that God intended to raise up another prophet like to Moses, which should have words by God put in his mouth, whom at the peril of their lives, they should be obliged to hearken, to give attention and obedience unto. (Which most certainly means a new revelation from God; or why should he be sent with that solemnity, only to

publish old laws?) That the days should come, when the Lord would make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and different from that he made with their fathers after their delivery from Egypt; not to be written on stones, but impressed on men's hearts. We may therefore well argue with the apostle, *If the first covenant had been faultless, and designed to abide in force, there would have been no place found for the second*; by his thus speaking of a new covenant, he intimated his intention of abolishing the old one. That the time would come, when God should give them pastors according to his own heart, which should feed them with knowledge and understanding; but in a way very different from the Jewish institution. That another priesthood should be infallibly established, not after the order of Aaron, to offer carnal sacrifices, but after the order of Melchisedeck, to import spiritual benedictions. That time should be, when God would gather all nations and tongues, and they should come and see his glory; and out of them God would take priests and levites, which was what the Mosaical constitution did not permit. That God would pour his spirit of prophecy upon all flesh; that the earth should be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea. But as the prophetic spirit hath long deserted the Jewish nation, they surely can never pretend to any such knowledge. That God would send him, so much wanted and desired by all nations, to whom the gathering of the people should be, the sun of righteousness arising with salvation in his wings; the redeemer that should come to Sion; the messenger of the covenant, whom God would give for a covenant of the people, to establish the earth; to reign and prosper, executing judgment and justice in the earth; whose name shall be called, Lord our righteousness; whom God would anoint to preach good tidings to the meek, and bind up the broken hearted. The meaning of all which is, that God in due time will send the Messiah to enlighten the world with a perfect instruction; to reveal his will and declare his mercy to mankind; to erect an universal spiritual kingdom in the minds and hearts of men, that they might more fully know and obey God. So that these places of scripture do sufficiently evince, that the Mosaical

Mosaical dispensation was in the design thereof mutable and transitory. And as it appears that God intended the abolition of this religion, so we see the same manifested. His providence hath not only disengaged men from that religion, but even discountenanced it, by preventing them from exercising and practising it according to its primitive rules and prescriptions. Since for above fifteen hundred years the Jews have been exiled from their ancient country, and dispersed over the world, wanting a place wherein to perform those most weighty parts of their worship and service to God; such as oblation of sacrifices, incense, and tithes. And their tribes being confounded, the distinction of priesthood and people seems to be removed; all the mysterious emblems of God's special presence, all the tokens of God's favour and endearment to them, are also quite lost; nothing substantial or solemn in their religion is left for them to put in practice if they would. All that they retain of their ancient institution is the observance of a few things of less importance, and these they have so blended and corrupted with impure mixtures of their own devising, with false and impious opinions, ridiculous and idle ceremonies, that genuine Judaism is no where to be found, nor indeed any where practised. So that what reason shewed fit to be, God hath performed, and experience doth confirm to have been done; I mean the cessation and abolition of the Jewish religion, both as to obligation and use.

Thus have I clearly evinced, that no other religion except Christianity, which is now in being, can reasonably pretend to have proceeded from God, as a universal, complete, and final declaration of his mind and will to mankind. Such as we have shewn is probable, that so wise a God, so just a Lord, so gracious a Father, would some time or other afford to his poor miserable creatures and children, the sons of Adam. My next discourse shall be to prove, that Christianity is in itself a doctrine and law endued with all the before-mentioned conditions, in every respect worthy to come from God, as it really did, and tending to promote his glory, and the benefit of mankind.

S E R M O N XXVI.

Of the Excellency of the Christian Religion.

1 Cor. ii. 6.

We shall speak wisdom to those which are perfect.

THE meaning of these words I take to be this; "That however some parts of the Christian doctrine, which St. Paul discovered unto those whom he instructed therein, without the advantages of subtle reasoning or elegant language, might seem to persons really ignorant, or be thought foolish and unreasonable by men prepossessed with contrary notions and corrupt affections; yet that the whole doctrine when entirely disclosed unto perfect men, such as are of adult and improved understandings, void of prejudice and free from vicious dispositions, would appear wisdom; that is, not only exactly true, but highly important and well adapted to attain the best ends, even such as are manifestly the most excellent, namely, the glorifying of God, and the salvation of men." This seems to be the meaning of St. Paul's assertion; and from hence I will endeavour briefly to represent some of the peculiar excellencies and perfections of the Christian religion, whereby the truth and wisdom thereof will be fully evinced.

The first excellency peculiar to the Christian doctrine, is, that it gives us a true, proper, and complete character or notion of God; such as perfectly agrees with what the best reason dictates, the works of nature declare, ancient tradition doth attest, and common experience testify: such a character as tends to produce in us love and reverence towards God, and to engage us to the strictest duty and obedience. It ascribes unto him the highest and greatest perfections of nature. In his essence it represents him one, eternal, perfectly simple and pure, omnipresent, omniscient, omnipotent, independent, impassible, and immutable; also as to his will and manner of acting, most absolute and free, good and benign, holy and just, true and faithful. It acknowledges him the maker and preserver of all beings, both material, and immaterial,

immaterial, visible and invisible. It attributes to him supreme majesty and authority over all; it informs us, that he framed this visible world for our use and benefit, preserving it, and governing us, with a particular care and providence. It discovers to us, that he deals very tenderly with rational creatures, being exceedingly careful of their good, most beneficent and merciful towards them; that he compassionates their suffering, is inclinable and ready to help them in their need, and to pardon their offences, if they earnestly desire and apply to him for it; and yet not so, as to indulge them in any wicked practices; he being impartially just, and inflexibly severe, towards all who obstinately persist in their iniquities. In short, it describes him most amiable in his goodness, most terrible in his justice, most glorious and righteous in all his ways of providence. In the Christian doctrine, there is nothing intermixed unworthy of, or misbecoming God, nothing added which is repugnant to what natural light discerns and approves; though it discovers something which that could not, concerning God's incomprehensible nature and manner of existence, his unsearchable counsels of wisdom, his admirable methods of providence, whereby he displays his goodness and glorifies his justice. And as it became God to reveal these truths which were not in the power of man to comprehend, so they wonderfully conspiring with those perfections of God, which are otherwise discernible by us, do most evidently confirm the divinity of them. For as the gospel relates nothing of divine things contradictory to reason, though it informs us of many particulars which no man's understanding could ever conceive and penetrate; we may therefore justly presume it came from a superior wisdom, and to be worthy of God. That God should send down his eternal son to partake of our nature and appear in our flesh, that he might thereby with the utmost advantage discover God's merciful intention towards us, and set before us an exact pattern of good life; that by his obedience and patience he might expiate our sins and reconcile us to God, also raise in us a hope of, and lead us in the way to, eternal happiness; this is indeed a mystery, a depth of wisdom, far exceeding our thought or contrivance,

and which, though not contrary to reason, yet is what we may better admire, than we can understand. O let us on the occasion say with Job and the Psalmist, *Lord, what is man that thou shouldst thus magnify and set thy heart upon him; or the son of man, that thou makest such account of him?*

And thus to instil into the minds of men a right and worthy notion of God, is most evidently a great excellency of any doctrine or religion; for according to men's conceptions of God, their practice whether religious or moral will be very much regulated. If men conceive well of God, that will induce them to render him such worship and obedience, as is worthy of, and acceptable to him; if they are ignorant of, or mistaken about him, they will perform such services, as will neither become nor please him.

A second great excellency, peculiar to the Christian religion, is, that it gives us a faithful account of ourselves, concerning our nature, original, and end; of our state past, present, and to come; points about which no reason, history or experience could ever otherwise resolve or satisfy us in. It teaches us, that we consist of a frail and mortal body, fashioned by God out of the earth, and of an immortal spirit derived from heaven, whereby we understand the dignity of our nature, the great obligations we lie under to God, and how we ought to behave both towards him and ourselves, answerable to and worthy of such a high birth and quality. It informs us that we were originally designed by a voluntary obedience to glorify our maker, and by so doing to partake of his eternal joy and felicity; and that we were accordingly created in a state agreeable to those purposes, fit to serve God, and capable thereby to continue for ever happy; but that by our wilful disobedience we lapsed from thence, into a wretched state of blindness, disorder, frailty, sorrow, and trouble. It farther acquaints us, how being thus alienated from God, and exposed to the effects of his just displeasure, we are yet again by his exceeding mercy and favour put into a capacity of being far more happy than we were before, if we will return unto God, and comply with his revealed will; or if we obstinately continue in our degeneracy and disobedience, that

that we shall most assuredly plunge ourselves deeper into an abyfs of endless misery. It fully represents to us, what shall be our future state and final doom, according to our demeanor and deserts in this life; what a strict trial, a severe judgment all our actions, even our transient words and most secret thoughts, must hereafter undergo, and how we shall be either exceedingly happy or extremely miserable for ever. It is this doctrine only which fully resolves us, wherein the final end and happiness of man consisteth; and what is the way of attaining it; assuring us it consists, not in a confluence of temporal things, but in the favour and enjoyment of God; and that this happiness is only to be obtained by a sincere and constant obedience to God's holy laws, by the practice of such piety and virtue as this doctrine prescribes. These important truths, so useful to satisfy our minds and direct our lives, are in the gospel very clearly revealed; namely, that man was at first made in a happy state, and fell from thence by his misbehaviour; that he afterwards became prone to vice and subject to pain; that our souls survive the body; and that after this life there shall be a day of reckoning and judgment, according to which good men, who are here often much afflicted, shall be then rewarded with joy and glory; and bad men, who commonly prosper here, shall be severely punished; these are points that the wisest men have always surmised, yet could not be certain of; but whose rational conjectures our religion doth positively and expressly assert and establish.

Another peculiar excellency of our religion is, that it prescribes an accurate rule of life, most agreeable to reason and to our nature, most conducive to our welfare and content, tending to procure each man's private good, and to promote the public benefit of all, by the strict observance whereof we bring our human nature to a resemblance of the divine; and we shall also thereby obtain God's favour, oblige and benefit men, and procure to ourselves the conveniences of a sober life, and the pleasure of a good conscience. For if we examine the precepts which respect our duty to God, what can be more just, pleasant or beneficial to us, than are those duties of piety which our religion enjoins? What is more fit and

reasonable; than that we should most highly esteem and honour him, who is most excellent? that we should bear the sincerest affection for him, who is perfect goodness himself, and most beneficial to us? that we should have the most awful dread of him, that is infinitely powerful, holy and just? that we should be very grateful to him, from whom we received our being, with all the comforts and conveniences of it? that we should entirely trust and hope in him, who can and will do whatever we may in reason expect from his goodness, nor can he ever fail to perform his promises? that we should render all due obedience to him, whose children, servants, and subjects we are? Can there be a higher privilege than to have liberty of access to him, who will favourably hear, and is fully able to supply our wants? Can we desire to receive benefits on easier terms than the asking for them? Can a more gentle satisfaction for our offences be required, than confession of them, repentance, and strong resolutions to amend them? The practice of such a piety, of a service so reasonable, cannot but be of vast advantage to us, as it procures peace of conscience, a comfortable hope, a freedom from all terrors and scruples of mind, from all tormenting cares and anxieties.

And if we consider the precepts by which our religion regulates our carriage and behaviour towards our neighbours and brethren, what can be imagined so good and useful, as those which the gospel affords? It enjoins us sincerely and tenderly to love one another; earnestly to desire and delight in each other's good; heartily to sympathize with all the evils and sorrows of our brethren; readily affording them all the help and comfort we are able; willingly to part with our substance, ease, and pleasure for their benefit and relief; not confining this our charity to particular friends and relations; but, in conformity to the boundless goodness of Almighty God, extending it to all. It requires us mutually to bear with one another's infirmities, mildly to resent and freely remit all injuries; retaining no grudge, nor executing no revenge, but requiting our enemies with good wishes and good deeds. It commands us to be quiet in our stations, diligent in our callings, true in our words, upright in our dealings,

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dealings, observant of our relations, obedient and respectful to our superiors, meek and gentle to our inferiors, modest and lowly, ingenuous and condescending in our conversation, candid in our censures; and innocent, inoffensive, and obliging in our behaviour towards all persons. It enjoins us to root out of our hearts all envy and malice, all pride and haughtiness; to restrain our tongues from all slander, detraction, reviling, bitter and harsh language; not to injure, hurt, or needlessly trouble our neighbour. It engages us to prefer the public good before our own opinion, humour, advantage, or convenience. And would men observe and practice what this excellent doctrine teaches; how sociable, secure, and pleasant a life we might lead! what a paradise would this world then become, in comparison to what it now is?

If we farther survey the laws and directions of our religion, with regard to the management of our souls and bodies, we shall also find that nothing could be devised more worthy of us, more agreeable to reason, or more productive of our welfare. It obliges us to preserve unto our reason its natural prerogative and due empire; not to suffer the brutish part to usurp and domineer over us; not to be enslaved to bodily temper, or deluded by vain fancy, to commit that which is unworthy of, or mischievous to us. It enjoins us to have sober and moderate thoughts concerning ourselves, suitable to our total dependance on God, to our natural meanness, weakness, and sinful inclinations; and that we should not be puffed up with self-conceit, or vain confidence in our wealth, honour, and prosperity. It directs us to compose our minds into a calm, serene, and cheerful state; that we should not easily be moved with anger, distracted with care or trouble, nor disturbed with any accident; but that we should learn to be content in every condition, and patiently bear all events that may happen to us. It commands us to restrain our appetites, to be temperate in our enjoyments; to abstain from all irregular pleasures, which may corrupt our minds, impair our health, lessen our estate, stain our good name, or prejudice our repose. It doth not prohibit us the use of any creature, that is innocent, convenient, or delightful; but indulgeth us a prudent and sober use of

them, so as we are thankful to God, whose goodness bestows them. It orders us to sequester our minds from the fading glories, unstable possessions, and vanishing delights of this world; things which are unworthy the attention and affection of an immortal spirit; and that we should fix our thoughts, desires, and endeavours on heavenly and spiritual objects, which are infinitely pure, stable, and durable: *not to love the world and the things therein, but to cast all our care on God's providence*; not to trust in uncertain riches, but to have our treasure, our heart, hope, and conversation in heaven. And as our religion delivers a most excellent and perfect rule of life, so it chiefly requires from us a rational and spiritual service. The ritual observances it enjoins are in number few, in nature easy to perform, also very reasonable, decent, and useful; apt to instruct us in, and excite us to the practice of our duty. And our religion hath this farther peculiar advantage, that it sets before us a living copy of good practice. Example yields the most compendious instruction, the most efficacious incitement to action; and never was there any example so perfect in itself, so fit for our imitation, as that of our blessed Saviour; intended by him to conduct us through all the parts of duty, especially in those most high and difficult ones, that of charity, self-denial, humility, and patience. His practice was suited to all degrees and capacities of men, and so tempered, that persons of all callings might easily follow him in the paths of righteousness, in the performance of all substantial duties towards God and man. It is also an example attended with the greatest obligations and inducements to follow it, whether we consider the great excellency and dignity of the person, (who was the most holy son of God,) or our manifold relations to him, being our lord and master, our best friend and most gracious redeemer; or the inestimable benefits we have received from him, even redemption from extreme misery, and being put into a capacity of the most perfect happiness; all which are so many potent arguments engaging us to imitate him.

Again, our religion doth not only fully acquaint us with our duty, but, which is another peculiar virtue thereof, it builds the same on the most solid foundation. Indeed, ancient philosophers have highly commended

commended virtue, and earnestly recommended the practice of it; but the grounds on which they laid its praise, and the arguments used to enforce its practice, were very weak; also the principles from whence it was deduced, and the ends they proposed, were poor and mean, if compared with ours. But the christian doctrine recommends goodness to us, not only as agreeable to man's imperfect and fallible reason, but as conformable to the perfect goodness, infallible wisdom, and most holy will of God; and which is enjoined us by this unquestionable authority, as our indispensable duty, and the only way to happiness. The principles from whence it directs our actions, are love, reverence, and gratitude to God; good-will to men, and a due regard to our own welfare. The ends which it prescribes are God's honour, and the salvation of men; it excites us to the practice of virtue, by reminding us that we shall thereby resemble the supreme goodness, express our gratitude to our great benefactor, discharge our duty to our almighty lord and king; that we shall thereby avoid the wrath and displeasure of God, and certainly obtain his favour, mercy, and every blessing necessary for us; that we shall escape not only the terrors of conscience here, but future endless misery and torment; that we shall procure not only present comfort and peace of mind, but acquire crowns of everlasting glory and bliss. These are the firmest grounds on which virtue can subsist, and the most effectual motives to the embracing of it.

Another peculiar advantage of Christianity, and which no other law or doctrine could ever pretend to, is, that as it clearly teaches and strongly persuades us to so excellent a way of life, so it sufficiently enables us to practice it; without which, such is the frailty of our nature, that all instruction, exhortation, and encouragement would little avail. The Christian law is no dead letter, but hath a quickening spirit attending it. It sounds the ear and strikes the heart of him who sincerely embraces it. To all good men it is a sure guide, and safety from all evil. If our minds are dark or doubtful, it directs us to a faithful oracle, where we may receive counsel and information; if our passions and appetites are unruly and outrageous; if temptations are violent and

threaten to overbear us, it leads us to a full magazine, where we may supply ourselves with all proper arms to withstand and subdue them. If our condition is disconsolate or desperate, here we may apply for relief and assistance: for on our earnest seeking and asking, it offers us the wisdom and power of God himself to direct, assist, support, and comfort us in all exigencies. To them, who with due fervency and constancy ask it, God hath promised in the gospel, to *grant his holy spirit*, to direct them in their ways, to admonish them of their duty, to strengthen them in obedience, to secure them from temptations; to support them in affliction. As this is peculiar to our religion, so it is of considerable advantage. For what would the more perfect rule signify, without power to observe, and knowledge to discern it? and how can a creature so ignorant, impotent, and inconstant as man; who is so easily deluded by false appearances, and transported with disorderly passions; know how to conduct himself, without some guide and assistance; or how to prosecute what is good for him, especially in cases of intricacy and difficulty? how can such an one continue in a good state, or recover himself from a bad one, or attain any virtuous habit, did he not apprehend such a friendly power ready on all occasions to guard and defend him? It is this consideration only that can nourish our hope, excite our courage, and quicken our endeavours in religious practice; as it assures us that there is no duty so hard, which by God's grace we may not perform, and no enemy so mighty, which, by his help, we cannot conquer; for though we are not able to do any thing of ourselves, yet we *can do all things by Christ that strengthens us*.

Our religion doth farther declare, that God is not only reconcilable, but desirous to be our friend, making overtures of grace to us, and offering a full pardon for all crimes we have committed. It assures us, that if we are careful to amend, God will not be *extreme to mark what is done amiss*; that by our infirmity we often fall, yet by our repentance we may rise again; that our endeavours to please God, though imperfect and defective, yet if serious and sincere, will be accepted by him. This is the tenor of that great covenant between heaven and earth, which the Son of God procured by his intercession,

sion, purchased by his wonderful patience and meritorious obedience, ratified and sealed by his blood, published to mankind, and confirmed the truth thereof by many wonderful miracles. Thus is our religion an inestimable benefit, and unspeakable comfort to all who sincerely embrace and firmly adhere to it; because it gives ease to their conscience, and encourages them in the practice of their duty.

The last advantage I shall mention, peculiar to the Christian doctrine, is the stile and manner of its speech, which is properly accommodated to the capacity of all persons, and worthy the majesty and sincerity of divine truth. It expresseth itself plainly and simply, without any affectation or artifice, ostentation of wit or eloquence. It speaks with an imperious awful confidence, in the strain of a king; its words carrying with them authority and power divine, commanding attention, assent, and obedience: as this you are to believe, this you are to do, on pain of our high displeasure, and at your utmost peril; for even your life and salvation depend thereon. Such is the stile and tenor of the scripture, such as plainly becomes the sovereign Lord of all to use, when he is pleased to proclaim his mind and will to us his creatures.

As God is in himself invisible, and that we could not bear the lustre and glory of his immediate presence, if ever he would convincingly signify his will and pleasure to us, it must be by effects of his incommunicable power, by works extraordinary and supernatural; and innumerable such hath God afforded in favour and countenance of our religion: as his clearly predicting the future revelation of this doctrine, by express voices and manifest apparitions from heaven; by frequently suspending the course of natural causes; by remarkable instances of providence; by internal attestations on the minds and consciences of men; by such wonderful means doth God demonstrate that the Christian religion came from him; an advantage peculiar to it, and such as no other institution, except that of the Jews, which was a prelude to it, could ever reasonably pretend to. I hope these considerations will be sufficient to vindicate our religion from all aspersions cast on it, by inconsiderate, vain, and dissolute persons, as also to con-

firm us in the esteem and excite us to the practice thereof.

And if men of wit would lay aside their prejudices, reason would compel them to confess, that the heavenly doctrines and laws of Christ, established by innumerable miracles; his completely holy and pure life, his meekness, charity, and entire submission to the will of God in his death, and his wonderful resurrection from the state of the dead, are most unquestionable evidences of the divinity of his person, of the truth of his gospel, and of the obligation that lies upon us, thankfully to accept him for our redeemer and saviour, on the gracious terms he has proposed. To love God with all our souls, who is the maker of our beings, and to love our neighbours as ourselves, who bear his image; as they are the sum and substance of the Christian religion, so are they duties fitted to our nature, and most agreeable to our reason. And therefore as the obtaining the love, favour, and kindness of God, should be the chief and ruling principle in our hearts, the first thing in our consideration, as what ought to govern all the purposes and actions of our lives; so we cannot possibly have more powerful motives to goodness, righteousness, justice, equity, meekness, humility, temperance, and chastity, or greater dissuatives and discouragement from all kinds of sin, than what the holy scriptures afford us. If we will fear and reverence God, love our enemies who despitefully use us, and do good in all our capacities, we are promised that our reward shall be very great; that we shall be the children of the Most High, that we shall be inhabitants of the everlasting kingdom of heaven, where there is laid up for us a crown of righteousness, of life and glory.

To conclude: let us strive to walk worthy of our holy profession and high calling in Christ Jesus, and answer the great ends of his incarnation, and dwelling among us. Let us diligently imitate the virtues of his life, and abhor the committing those sins, for the expiation of which he submitted to a bloody and ignominious death. Let the consideration of his resurrection from the grave, and ascension into heaven, strengthen our faith and hope of immortality, mortify and destroy in us all evil concupiscence and fleshly lusts, and raise our affections

to things above, that in God's fit time we may inherit everlasting life. May the God of patience enable us to resist the most alluring temptations, and quietly bear the greatest afflictions, rather than wound our consciences, and make shipwreck of the faith. May the God of consolation give us will and strength to endure all labours and weariness in running to the end of our Christian race, that having preserved our innocence and purity through the stage of our lives, at Christ's second coming we may obtain everlasting bliss and glory; which God of his infinite mercy grant, &c.

S E R M O N XXVII.

By BISHOP HOPKINS.

The First Commandment.

EXOD. XX. 1, 2, 3.

God spake these words, and said, I am the Lord thy God; thou shalt have none other Gods but me.

THERE are two things in general that perfects a Christian, the one a clear and distinct knowledge of his duty; the other a conscientious practice of it; and both these are equally necessary. For as we can have no solid well grounded hopes of eternal salvation without obedience, so we can have no sure, certain rule of duty without knowledge. It hath therefore pleased God, who is the great governor, and will be the righteous judge of all the world, to prescribe us laws for the regulating of our actions, that we might be informed what we ought to do, and what to avoid. And that we may not be ignorant of those laws, he hath openly declared them in his word. For when mankind had miserably defaced the law of nature, originally written in their hearts, if seemed good to God's infinite wisdom and mercy, to transcribe and copy out that law in the second table of the Scriptures.

The Bible is the statute book of God's kingdom; therein is comprised the whole body of the heavenly laws, the perfect rules of an holy life, and the sure promises of a glorious one. And the Decalogue or Ten Commandments, is a summary or brief epitome of those laws, written by the immediate finger of God, and contracted into a short abridgment, both to ease our memories and gain our veneration. And if we consider how few

the expressions are, and yet regard the copiousness and variety of the matters contained in them, we must acknowledge not only their authority to be divine, but also the wisdom of their great author, in reducing the whole duty of man, to so brief a compendium. The words are but few, therefore called the ten words; but the matter contained in them, is vast and infinite, and the rest of the Scripture, for the chief part, is but a commentary upon them; either exhorting us to obedience by arguments, alluring us to it by promises, terrifying us from transgressing by threats, or exciting us to the one, and restraining us from the other, by examples recorded in the historical parts.

The time when the Commandments were delivered was about 2460 years after the creation of the world; the manner of its delivery was very terrible and astonishing: the wisdom of God designing it so, on purpose to possess the people with the greater reverence of it, and to revive in their minds a due respect to those old despised dictates of their natures, by their seeing the same laws invigorated with so much dread and terror. For the Decalogue is not so much the enacting of new laws, as reviving the old by a more solemn proclamation.

The manner in which God appeared to pronounce his laws, was very terrible; for thunder and lightning, earthquakes, fire, and darkness, were the prologue and introduction to it; and so dreadful was it, as to make not only the people to remove and stand afar off, but even so affrighted Moses himself, the messenger of God, as that he did *exceedingly fear and quake*. And this dreadful appearance of God in delivering the law, was no doubt intended to affect them with a reverent esteem of those commands, and to put them and us in mind, that if he was thus terrible only in delivering the law, he will appear much more so, when he shall come to judge us for transgressing it.

But some will say, is not the law abrogated by the coming of Christ? doth not the Scripture frequently testify that we are not now under the law, but under grace, Christ being made under the law to free those who were under the law? To which I answer, so far from its being abolished by the coming of Christ, that he himself expressly tells us, *he came not to destroy, but to fulfil the law*.

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It should be observed, that the laws which God delivered by Moses, were of three sorts, the ceremonial, judicial, and moral law. The ceremonial law concerned those observances of sacrifices and offerings, purifications and cleansings, which were typical of Christ, and that sacrifice of his, which alone was able to take away sin. The judicial law consisted of those constitutions which God prescribed the Jews for their civil government; for their state was a theocracy, that is, the laws for their religion and civil government were both divine, being immediately from God; so that their judicial law was given them to be the standing law of their nation, by which all actions and suits were to be tried and determined. The moral law is a system or a body of those precepts which carry an universal and natural equity in them, being so consonant to the light of reason, and the dictates of every man's conscience, that as soon as ever they are declared and understood, we must subscribe to the justice and righteousness of them. These are the three sorts of laws, which commonly go under the name of the law of Moses; all of which had respect either to those things which prefigured the Messiah to come, or to those which concerned their political and civil government, or to those natural virtues and duties of piety to God, and righteousness to men, that were common to them with the rest of mankind.

As for the ceremonial law, we Christians say, it is abrogated and repealed even unto the Jews themselves. For this law was given to be only a faint representation of Christ. Indeed, the Jews saw some glimmering light of him in their ceremonies and observances; but now the Gospel appears, and that light which before was but blooming, is fully spread; those dimmer lights are quite extinguished thereby, and an utter end is put to all those rites and ceremonies, which intimated and supplied the want of the substance: so that to maintain now a necessity of legal sacrifices, purifying and sprinklings, is no less than to evacuate the death of Christ, and deny the shedding of that blood, which alone can purify us from all pollutions. It is the abrogation and disannulling of this ceremonial law, that the Apostle Paul so often mentions in his Epistles. As to us, the posterity and descendants of the Gentiles, the ceremo-

nial law was never in force, being national to the Jews only, and peculiar to them; nor indeed is the judicial law in force to us, it not extending, nor never was intended to oblige us. However, the judicial law is not abrogated to the Jews, for though now in their dispersed state, the law ceases to be in force, because they are not a body politic; yet were they to be collected into a republic, most probably the same national laws would again bind them, as in former times.

As to the moral law, of which I am now treating, that is abrogated in part, as to some of its circumstances, but not as to any thing of its substance, authority, and obligation. The moral law is abrogated to Christians as it was a covenant of works, for God in man's first creation wrote this law in his heart, and added this sanction unto it, *if thou doest this, thou shalt live; if not, thou shalt die the death.* Now all mankind by the fall of Adam, contracting an utter impotency of obeying this law, that we might not all perish according to the rigorous sentence of it, God was graciously pleased to enter into another covenant with us, promising a Saviour to repair our lapsed condition, and eternal life upon the easier terms of faith and evangelical obedience. The moral law is also abrogated to Christians as to its condemning power, for though it sentenceth every sinner to death, and curseth every one who continueth not in all things that are written therein, to do them; yet through the intervention of Christ's satisfaction and obedience, our sins are graciously pardoned, the venom and malignity of the curse abolished by Christ, *who hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us*: and therefore we may triumphantly exult with the Apostle, *there is now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus.* So that Christians are indeed freed from the moral law, as it hath the obligation of a covenant, and a power of condemnation. But then it remains still in its full vigour and authority, considered as a standing rule for our obedience; it still directs what we ought to do, binds the conscience to the performance of it, brings guilt upon the soul if we transgress it, and reduceth us to the necessity either of bitter repentance, or eternal condemnation; in this sense, *heaven and earth shall sooner pass away, than one jot or tittle shall pass from*

the law. As then the moral law is no other than the law of nature written upon men's hearts, at the first; (some positive ones being only superadded;) for the same reason as we are men, we owe obedience to its dictates. And indeed, we find every part of this law enforced in the gospel, and charged upon us with the same threatenings, recommended to us by the same promises, and all interpreted by our Saviour himself, to the greatest advantage of strictness and severity. We find the same rules for our actions, the same duties required, and sins forbidden, in the gospel as in the law; only in the gospel there are mitigations, which were not in the covenant of works; namely, that God, through Christ, will accept of our repentance and sincere endeavours to amend our lives, instead of that perfect obedience and spotless purity which he required under the law.

Before I particularly treat of the Decalogue or Ten Commandments, I think it necessary to give some general rules, for the right understanding and expounding them, which will be very useful for our better apprehending their full latitude and extent. The Psalmist tells us, that the commandments of God are exceeding broad, i. e. they are exceeding strait, as to any indulgence allowed to the unruly lusts and appetites of men; but exceeding broad, in comprehensiveness of their injunctions, extending their authority over all the actions of our lives. These following rules are therefore necessary for us to observe concerning the Ten Commandments. As there is no duty required, nor sin forbidden by God, but it falls under one or more of these ten words; so to the right and genuine interpretation of this law, we must take in whatsoever the Prophets, Apostles, or Christ himself hath delivered as comments or expositions thereon. For the Decalogue is a compendium of all that they have taught concerning moral worship and justice: Nay, our Saviour doth epitomize this very epitome itself, and reduceth those ten words into two, love to God, which comprehends all the duties of the first table; and love to our neighbour, which comprizes all the duties of the second; and tells us, that upon these two hang all the laws and the prophets. And indeed, a due love of God, and of our neighbour, will make us careful to perform all the duties of religion to

the one, and of justice to the other; and keep us from attempting any violation to God's honour, or violence to our neighbour's right. And therefore the Apostle assures us, that love is the fulfilling of the law; and that the end of the commandment is charity of love; that is, the end, completion, or consummation of the commandment, is love to God and to one another. And since most of the commandments are delivered in negative or prohibiting terms, and only the fourth and fifth in affirmative ones; we ought to observe this rule, that the affirmative commands include in them a prohibition of the contrary sin; and the negative commands include an injunction of the contrary duty; and also the contrary to what is commanded, is always implied to be forbidden. For instance, God, in the third commandment, forbids the taking his name in vain; therefore, by consequence, the hallowing and sanctifying his name is therein commanded. The fourth requires the sanctifying of the sabbath-day; therefore it follows, that the profanation of it, is thereby prohibited. The fifth, commands us to honour our parents; therefore it forbids us to be disobedient or injurious to them.

Observe also, that the same precept, which forbids the external and outward acts of sins, forbids likewise the inward desires and motions of sin in the heart; and the same precepts which require the external acts of duty, do also require such holy affections of the soul as are suitable thereto. For instance; the same command that requires us to worship God, exacts from us not only the outward service of the body, but much more the inward reverence and affection of our souls. That we should prostrate not only our body but our very heart at his feet; fearing him as the mighty God, loving him as the greatest good, as our only joy and happiness. So likewise that positive command, honour thy father and mother, demands from us not only the external acts of obedience to all the lawful commands of our parents and magistrates, and those whom God hath set in authority over us; but also an inward love, veneration, and esteem, for them in our hearts. And then, as for negative commands, they not only forbid the external acts of sin, but the inward motions of lust, sinful desires, and evil concupiscence. And thus we find

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find it at large in our Saviour's excellent sermon on the mount; a great part of which is to clear and vindicate the moral law from the corrupt glosses and interpretations of the scribes and pharisees; and to shew that the authority of the law extended, not only to prohibit sinful actions, but sinful affections also. They thought it no crime to have their hearts burn with wrath, malice, and revenge, so long as they concealed it there, and did not suffer it to break forth into murder. But our Saviour assures us, that not only the sin of murder is forbidden by the law, but all the incentives to, and degrees of it, whether conceived in the heart, or expressed in words. And the same as to lustful thoughts and affections, *ye have heard, that it was said by them of old time, thou shalt not commit adultery; but I say unto you, that whosoever shall look upon a woman to lust after her, hath committed adultery already with her in his heart.* From these few instances, and many more which might be produced, it appears that the same precept which forbids the outward acts of sin, does also prohibit the inward motions of these in the heart; and indeed there is a great deal of reason for it: for God, who is our lawgiver, is a spirit, and there is not the least thought in our mind, not the least shadow of an imagination raised in our fancy, not the most silent breathing of a desire in our heart, but God is privy to it; for he knows our thoughts, as the Psalmist says, afar off; he discerns our souls more clearly and distinctly than we can behold each other's faces; and therefore, it is but fit and reasonable, that his laws should reach as far as his knowledge.

Another rule for understanding the Decalogue is, to observe the commands of the second table for the sake of the first. Those duties, which immediately respect the service and worship of God, are contained in the first table; those which concern our demeanour to men, in the second. The worship and service of God is not to be performed out of respect to men; but our duty to men is to be observed in regard to God. The first table commands us not to worship idols, not to swear, not to prophane the sabbath. But if we abstain from these sins, because they will expose us to shame, or suffering among men; if we only worship God, that men may respect and venerate us, all the pomp

and ostentation of our religion is but hypocrisy. For God expects to be served, not for man's sake, but for his own. The second table prescribes the right ordering of our conversation towards men; that we should be dutiful and obedient to our superiors; loving and kind to our equals; charitable and beneficial to our inferiors; just and righteous towards all. These duties are not to be done only for man's sake, but for God's; and those who perform them without respecting God in them, will lose their reward and acceptance.

The preface to the Ten Commandments carries an equal respect and reverence to them all, and contains a strong argument to enforce obedience to every one. It is usual with kings and princes on earth, to prefix their names and titles to those laws and edicts which they publish, in order to gain the more attention and greater veneration to them. And the great God, who is King of kings, when he proclaimed a law to his people Israel, that he might affect them with the deeper reverence of his authority, and make them the more afraid to transgress the laws, enacted by so mighty and glorious a majesty: He thus displays his name and stile before them; *I am the Lord thy God*; that they might learn to fear his glorious name. As all arguments the most prevalent and cogent, are adapted to work upon one of these two passions, our fear or love; so here, God hath accommodated himself to our temper, and proclaims his authority to beget fear; *I am the Lord thy God*: His goodness and mercy to engage love; *that brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.* And what motives can have so strong an influence on our natures, and so readily engage us to obedience, as love and fear? What motives can be urged more enforcing than these, which are drawn both from power and goodness? The one obliging us to subjection, the other to gratitude.

He is the Lord God, the great creator, only proprietor, absolute governor and disposer of all things; and therefore we owe a reverential and lawful observance to all his laws and injunctions. It is but just and reasonable, that we should be subject unto him that created us, and who, if we rebel against him, hath infinite power eternally to destroy us. He is the

Lord God, whose kingdom is from everlasting to everlasting; whose dominions have no bounds, either of time or place. His voice shakes the heavens, and removes the earth out of its place. His way is in the whirlwind; storms and tempests are his harbingers. The clouds are the dust raised by his feet; the mountains quake at his presence; the hills melt away at his displeasure; the world and all the inhabitants of it shall be dissolved. Who is like unto thee, O Lord, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders; and therefore who would not fear thee, O king of nations, tremble and be astonished when once thou art angry? Shall we then, who are vile and wretched sinners, despise the authority and majesty of the great God, before whom all the powers of heaven and earth lie prostrate? Dare we infringe his laws, and violate his commands, who is so great and terrible a God, that he can destroy us with the very breath of his nostrils? Are we able to contend with this God, are we equal to the Almighty? Who among us can dwell with devouring fire, and everlasting burnings? Did we frequently affect our hearts with a serious consideration of the dread majesty and supreme authority of the great God, we should not presumptuously provoke him. Fear is a most excellent preservative against sin; a strong fence which God hath set about his law, to keep us from breaking the bounds that he hath prescribed; and therefore, we are advised to fear God and keep his commandments; to stand in awe and sin not.

As the authority of God is here set forth to move us to obedience by working upon our fear; so his goodness and mercies are declared to us, in order to engage us thereto, from a principle of love and gratitude. *The Lord thy God, who hath brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.* This, though it be a soft, yet is a most powerful and effectual argument. For hath God surrounded us with blessings, and loaded us every day with his benefits? Have we received our life, our being from him, and so many comforts in which he allows us to take delight? Have we been delivered by his watchful providence from many deaths and dangers, restored from sickness, or preserved in health? Doth he feed us at his table, clothe us out of his

wardrobe, and, what is infinitely more, hath he sent his only Son, to lay down his life, and shed his most precious blood for us? Hath he revealed to us his gospel, and therein given us the promise of eternal glory; a glory which hope was not bold enough to expect, nor imagination large enough to conceive? Hath he sent his Spirit to seal and ratify his promises, and crowned us with many rich blessings here, and will reward us with joy and happiness hereafter? I say, hath he done all these wonderful things for us, and can we be so unkind and disingenuous as to deny any thing to that God, who hath bestowed on us such inestimable favours and benefits? Can we despise his precepts, who is ever willing to reward our prayers? Will not we hear him speaking unto us, who hath so often heard, helped, and saved us, when we have cried unto him? Shall we not carefully obey his laws, since he requireth obedience from us, as the evidence and expression of our love to him?—*He that hath my commandments and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me.* And what doth the Lord thy God require of thee, but to *fear the Lord thy God, and to love him, and to keep his commandments, which I command thee this day for thy good?* God might have required from us the very same obedience he now doth, without promising any reward for it. We owe him all that we possibly can do, as the author of our being; and every power and faculty of our souls ought to be employed for him, who gave them to us. Thus we see how God hath enforced the observation of his laws upon us, both by his authority and his mercy; the one to work on our fear, the other on our love, and both to engage us to obedience.

I proceed to consider the precepts themselves, whereof the first and chiefest is, *Thou shalt have no other Gods but me*; which requires, That we have a God and worship him: That we have the true God for our God: That we have no other beside him.

It would be tedious and endless to insist particularly on all the duties included in the true and sincere worship of God. I shall therefore speak only of the three most remarkable ones, which are, to love God, to fear and praise him. In this command is required the most supreme love of God; the love of him, being not only

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only the sum of this, but all the commands of the first table; therefore our Saviour, when he gave an abridgment of the law, comprized all the ten under two great commands, *Thou shalt love the Lord thy God, with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind; this is the first and great commandment; and the second is like unto it, thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.* From whence the Apostle infers, that love is the fulfilling of the law. We should have a great and earnest desire after God, *our souls should pant after him as the hart panteth after the water-brooks, and even thirst for the living God.* Again, this command requires us to fear God; and certainly we cannot have the Lord for our God, unless we fear and reverence him: for as the love, so the fear of God, is the sum of all the commandments, and indeed the substance of all religion; and generally the character of a true worshipper and obedient servant of God is, that he is a man fearing God. If we acknowledge there is a God, it is but reasonable that we should fear his essential greatness and glory. For take away the fear of a deity, and a supreme power that can reward and punish the actions of men, and there is a flood-gate opened for all villany and wickedness.

Another principal part of worship required in this first precept is, the invocation of the name of God in our prayers and praises. Love and fear respect the inward worship of God in our hearts, but this appertains to his outward worship, and by it we give express testimonies that we love and fear him. Prayer and praises are the tribute and homage of religion; by the one we acknowledge our dependance upon God; by the other we confess that all our blessings and comforts are from him. Such then, as neither pray unto God nor praise him, cannot be said to have a God, for they acknowledge none, but are gods unto themselves: and as the love and fear of God are often used in scripture for his whole worship and service, so is this invocation of his name, *Pour out thy fury upon the heathen that know thee not, and upon the families that call not upon thy name;* that is, those who do not worship or serve him. And, as this first command requires, in the general, that the true God should be truly worshipped; so the three next following commands prescribe the means and branches of his

worship, and how he would have it performed. The second commandment requires us to worship God who is a spirit, without any visible image or representation of the deity. For as it is impossible there should be any true resemblance made of a spirit, so it is most impious to give any part of divine honour and reverence unto dumb idols. The third commandment requires, that we should never mention the name of the great God slightly and impertinently, but with the utmost veneration and serious affection. The fourth prescribes us the time which God hath set apart and sanctified for his solemn worship; so that each command of the first table is relative to divine worship, but the first is the foundation of the other three. This brings me to shew, that

We are to have the true God for our God. The ground-work of all religion, and the foundation of all our hopes, consist in owning and believing the true God: He of whom Moses affirms, that he made heaven and earth. He who made a covenant with Abraham, and miraculously delivered the Israelites out of the house of bondage, is here made the object of our adoration: He it is that is to have our prayers and praises, and all divine honours; in a word, it is he that must be loved, feared, and trusted above all things. Nor should we have any other God beside him; meaning that we should make the true God, or the God of Israel, the sole object of divine worship, and give no divine honours to any else; and which is, in effect, the same with our Saviour's precept, *thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve.* This was indeed the principal thing intended in this commandment; for the Israelites were too prone to forget God, to fall into idolatry, and worship the gods of the Egyptians. And therefore, to prevent this, the first commandment begins with this strict precept, *thou shalt have no other Gods before me.*—Thus much for the duties required in the first commandment; I now proceed to observe what is forbidden. And, in general,

Atheism, or the disbelief of a God, is prohibited and condemned by this command. For if there be no God, what difference is there whether we pray or blaspheme; whether we lead holy and pious lives, or let loose the reins to all manner of lewdness and riot; to all the impure delights

delights that vice and sensuality can recommend to our corrupt appetites? For if there be no God, there can be no rewards nor punishments: and therefore it will be necessary to shew the folly and unreasonableness of atheism, and to convince men there is a God, without which all religion and worship is but folly and madness. I shall therefore briefly confirm this great and primary truth, by such convincing and demonstrative arguments as the subject will permit.

The universal consent of all nations strongly proves the being of a deity. And what all agree in must needs be accounted a dictate of nature, a maxim of truth. Though mankind have strangely differed about other things, concerning their laws, government, customs, and manner of worshipping God, yet all agree in the belief of a deity. Never was there any nation so wild and barbarous that did not acknowledge a God; their great fault and folly was to acknowledge too many. How could the world be so easily drawn into such several shapes and forms of religion, as among the Heathen were almost infinite, and among others too various and different, was there not a natural inclination in the souls of men, to embrace some religion or other, and an indelible character of a deity imprinted on their minds. Inasmuch, that in the times of darkness, rather than be without a deity, some would dig gods out of their gardens, and consecrate dogs and serpents. Some few indeed may have been found, who have not believed a deity; but there is no reason from thence to conclude it no dictate of nature: for how many are there that violate the laws of nature, and do those things which the innate light and reason of a man abhor and abominate? Yet none will from thence infer, that there are no such things as natural laws. So neither though some may have razed out of their minds any notion of God, yet it does not follow that the belief of a supreme being is not an impression of nature. Another demonstration of the existence of a deity is the frame and order of the universe, in which there are as many wonders as creatures. Let us cast but our eyes upwards, and contemplate the vast expansion of the heavens, which are the canopy of the world, the roof of this great house the universe. How gloriously is this canopy studded! How

many glittering lights appear to illuminate our inferior world, to discover to our eyes all visible objects, and to our minds the invisible God! Who hath gilded the rays of the sun, or silvered the face of the moon? Who hath marshalled the mighty host of heaven, and set the stars in such array, that not one of them breaks its rank, nor strays from its order? Whose hand is it that turns the great wheels of heaven, and makes them spin out days, months and years, time and life unto us? Who hath ordered the vicissitudes of day and night, summer and winter, that these run not into one another, and blind the world in confusion; but with a perpetual variety observe their just seasons and interchanges? Do not all these wonderful works proclaim aloud, that certainly there is a great and glorious God, who sits enthroned on high, who hath thus paved the bottom of heaven with stars, and adorned the inner parts of it with glories yet to us unknown? Let us descend lower through the vast ocean of liquid air. How comes it to pass, and whose wisdom and providence did so order, that there should not fall whole clouds of rain, but only drops and showers? An effect so wonderful, that scarce any other work of nature is more frequently in scripture ascribed unto God, as a demonstration of his power and goodness, than that he sendeth rain upon the earth. And let the atheist tell, how it comes to pass, that the same cloud should be both a fountain of water, and yet a furnace of fire. This the prophet particularly ascribes to the Almighty God; he maketh lightnings with the rain. If we descend into the lowest story of this great building the earth; what a variety of wonder shall we there find? That the whole mass and globe of it should hang pendulous in the air, without any thing to support it: that this great and ponderous body should be fixed for ever in its place; having no foundation to support it, but that air which every mote and fly doth easily cut through: that this round ball of earth should be inhabited on every part: these, and many other things, are such unaccountable mysteries to our comprehension, and yet by experience known to be true, that he must be an atheist out of mere obstinacy, who seriously considers them, and does not adore the infinite power and wisdom of their author.

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But what makes some proud spirits backward to acknowledge God in the works of nature is, that they think by their reason to give a plausible account of those effects and phenomena which we see in the world, by deducing them from second and natural causes. Hence some have thought, that reason and philosophy are great enemies to religion, and patrons of atheism; but in truth, the atheist hath not a more smart and keen adversary than true reason and profound philosophy. I dare challenge the most learned men in the world, to give a satisfactory account of the most vulgar and common appearances in nature, without resolving them at last into the will and disposal of the God of nature. If I should ask them what makes the grass green, a stone to fall downwards, the fire to aspire upwards, or the sun to enlighten and warm the earth; what answers can they give, but that it is the property of their natures? If I farther enquire how their natures came to be distinguished with such properties, they must either be silent, or confess a first cause, which endowed their natures with such properties and actions; so that all must at last be resolved into, and terminate in God. And,

Unless the being of a God be presupposed, there can no tolerable account be given of the being of any thing. We see innumerable different beings in the world; and what rational account can the atheist give how they came into being? Why, says Epicurus, the world had once a beginning, but it was by chance; and Aristotle, that the world is from eternity, and never had any beginning.—In answer to the first, I say with Cicero, that they will as soon persuade me, that an innumerable parcel of loose and disordered letters, being often shaken together, and afterwards thrown out upon the ground, shall fall into such an exquisite order, as to frame a most ingenious heroic poem; as that atoms straying to and fro at random, should casually meet to make a world consisting of heaven and air, sea and earth, and so many sorts and species of living creatures; in the frame and composition of which we see such wonderful and inimitable skill.—And if those atoms could thus fortuitously frame a world, why had not they built houses and cities, and woven us garments, that so, by very good chance, we might have found these

necessaries ready provided to our hands, and saved us the trouble and labour of making them? Again, if we look on the most contemptible worm that crawls, we shall find it a far more excellent piece of mechanism, a far more curious engine, than any the art or wit of man could frame; and shall chance too make these?

As to the eternity of the world, it is very unreasonable that such should deny a God, who yet grant the very thing for which alone they deny him. The reason that tempts atheists to deny a deity is, because they cannot conceive a being infinite and eternal; and yet, by owning the world to be so, they run into the very inconveniency they would be thought to avoid; and instead of acknowledging one eternal being, confess there are innumerable. But if the world be eternal, there must of necessity have been past an infinite succession of ages; and, which is as difficult for us to conceive as an infinite being that should create the world. I could give many more demonstrations to evince, that there is such a supreme and infinite being as a deity, but these are sufficient to convince any atheist, who will be swayed by that reason which he so much desires and adores, that there is a God.

What then remains, but that having proved the folly and unreasonableness of speculative atheism, we proceed to condemn the impiety of practical atheism; the profaneness and irreligion of those who live as without God in the world; as if there was no God or devil, no heaven nor hell, no future state of rewards and punishments: indeed, in this sense every wicked man is an atheist, and such as the Apostle describes, *they profess that they know God; but in works they deny him, being abominable and disobedient, and to every good work reprobate.* Did they really and cordially believe, that there is a just and holy God, who takes notice of all their actions; a great and terrible Majesty, who will call them to a strict account for all their thoughts, all their discourses, and all their works; an almighty God, who hath prepared wrath and vengeance to inflict on all those who despise his authority and transgress his laws: I say, did they sincerely believe this, would they dare to profane his glorious and reverend name, by impertinently using it in their trifling discourses? or rend and tear it

it by oaths and blasphemies, hellish execrations and curses? Did they believe the horrors and torments, the stench and darkness, the woe and anguish of the damned in hell, which are as far from being utterable, as they are from being tolerable? Did they certainly believe these things, surely they would not still presume to venture on treasuring up to themselves wrath against the day of wrath. And, was this really believed, swearing, lying and stealing, drunkenness and uncleanness, would not so generally reign among us, as now they do. Indeed, we persuade ourselves that we do believe these things; we profess that there is a God infinitely holy and just; that he will recompense tribulation, anguish, and wrath upon every soul of man that doth evil; but, alas! this is only a verbal belief, contradicted and disowned by a practical atheism. The little influence that the belief of a just God hath upon us, to regulate our actions, and engage us to walk in an holy awe and dread of his divine majesty, clearly evinceth, that we may indeed fancy these things, but do not believe them. For did we seriously and heartily believe, that there is a great and jealous God, who hath said, *vengeance is mine, I will repay it*, what is there in the world, that could persuade us to offend him?

Possibly there are some, who, though they believe there is a God, yet are not fully persuaded that he is so holy, nor so just, as his word declares him to be; not so holy in hating our sins, nor so just in punishing them. But this is only to hope in his mercy, in defiance of his truth. He hath sworn that he will take vengeance on all impenitent wretches, and destroy such as wilfully go on in their sins; and God will be true to his threatenings as well as his promises. Indeed if we believe there is a God, and yet think he will spare us, though we go on presumptuously to add iniquity unto sin, we are far worse than any atheist. It is better to have no opinion of God at all, than such an one as is unworthy of him. Even Plutarch an heathen could say, "it was far less injurious to him, if any should deny there was such a man as Plutarch, than

to say that such an one indeed there was, but that he was faithless, inconstant, cruel, or revengeful." Nor is it so heinous an affront against the divine majesty, to deny there is any such supreme being; as to acknowledge there is indeed a God, but that he is not infinitely holy in hating our sins, infinitely true to his threatenings, nor infinitely just in punishing men's impenitency and disobedience. This is a degree of impiety worse than atheism, and yet all wicked ungodly sinners are guilty thereof. Know then, O sinner, and tremble, that there is a God who sees and observes all thy actions, who writes them down in the book of his remembrance, and will call thee to a strict account for them, and judge thee out of thy own mouth. But if we believe there is a God, why do we not fear and serve him? If we believe there is an heaven, and hell, and an eternity to come, why do we not live answerably to this belief? Let us either blot it out of our creed, and declare we do not believe in God the Father almighty, or else live as those should do, who acknowledge so great and terrible, so pure and holy a God. For a speculative atheist to be profane and wicked, is but consonant to his principles; for why should not he gratify all his lusts and sensual desires, whose only hope is in this life, and who thinks not to be accountable for any thing hereafter? But for such as acknowledge a deity, to live as without God in the world, to break his laws, slight his promises, and despise his threatenings, is the greatest and most desperate madness in the world. If therefore we know, and believe in God, let us glorify him as God, paying all holy obedience to his laws, and humble submission to his will; conforming ourselves to his purity, depending upon his power and providence, trusting in his infinite mercy and goodness, until we at last arrive to that state of perfect bliss and felicity, when we shall fully know the ineffable mystery of the deity, see him that is now invisible, and live there as much by sense and sight, as here we do by faith and expectation. Thus much for the first commandment.

S E R M O N XXVIII.

By Dr. HOLE.

The Second Commandment.

Exod. xx. 4, 5, 6.

Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image,
or any likeness, &c.

ALMIGHTY God having in the first commandment settled the true object of divine worship, and confined it wholly to himself, in opposition to all manner of idols, or false Gods; he proceeds in this second commandment to direct us in the right way of performing it; which is not done by any images or visible representations of him, but in a spiritual manner, suited to his nature and will. This is the true design of these words, *thou shalt not make to thyself any graven image*. This commandment being negative, I shall first consider what is therein forbidden, and then what is commanded. The things forbidden, are the *making and worshipping of any graven image*. Not that all making of images, pictures, or representations of any creature, is hereby prohibited; or that the trade of a painter, carver, or engraver, are unlawful; for we find some images made and appointed by the order of God himself, as the cherubims, the brazen serpent, and the like: and Moses ascribes the skill of *Aholiab and Bezaleel, in working the work of an engraver, to the holy spirit of God*. So that all images or representations of things are not here absolutely forbidden, for that would condemn all pictures, or likenesses of any thing, and render our very coin unlawful. But the images here forbidden to be made, are images of God, or representations of the divine nature; which being spiritual and immaterial, may not be represented by any bodily shape. For God being infinite and incomprehensible, cannot be represented by any image, without debasing and disparaging him: and therefore the prophet enquires, *to whom will ye liken God, or what likeness will ye compare unto him?* And the Apostle bids us, *not to think the Godhead to be like unto gold and silver, or stone graven by the art and invention of man*; and much less, *to change the glory of the incorruptible God, into an image made like to corruptible man, to birds, or four-footed beasts, or creeping things*.

There is such a vast disproportion between an image, and the divine nature, that we cannot liken one to the other without affronting and dishonouring God. An image can only be made of corporeal things; and for such as are finite and corruptible, to make an image of God, is to bring down that infinite being to the dimensions of a finite creature; and in effect to deny the spirituality and incorruptibility of his nature. And therefore we find a very strict charge given to the Israelites, against image-making: *take good heed unto yourselves, for you saw no image in the day when the Lord spake unto you in Horeb, out of the midst of the fire; that you corrupt not yourselves, and make you a graven image*. And in this commandment, we have an express prohibition of making any likeness or similitude of God, by any thing either in heaven above, as by the sun, moon, and stars; or in the earth beneath, as by the fowls of the air, the four-footed beasts, or creeping things; or in the water under the earth, by the fish, or any thing in the sea; no, nor yet by the likeness of man, the Lord of all these. For though God made man in his own image, yet man is not to make God in his; by reason of the infinite distance and disproportion there is between them. And when God is described in scripture with eyes, hands, and arms, and the like, yet this is done merely in compliance with our infirmities, and is spoken after the manner of men, and to be understood in a way becoming the divine majesty: but cannot justify the making any image of him, or the picturing him in any human shape, which is to prostitute our maker, and to think him such as ourselves. This is to confine omnipresence to a place, circumscribe immensity, and degrade the deity to the properties and infirmities of human nature. We may not then represent God in a bodily shape, or form false apprehensions of him in our mind, by making him like ourselves; much less are we permitted to worship any image or representation of God; *thou shalt not bow down to it, or worship it*.

In which words there is a two-fold worship implied; the one external, in the outward reverence, and bowing the body; the other internal, consisting in the inward worship and reverence of the mind. And we are here forbidden to give any bodily worship to images, by bowing or falling down

down to them. The Israelites were strictly charged, *not to serve other Gods, or bow themselves unto them.* And such were sharply reprov'd, who bowed the knee to Baal, or fell down before any idol. The idolatry of the heathens is frequently set forth by prostrations, bowings, and other visible acts of bodily reverence, used to their false deities; which being tokens of the inward devotion of their minds towards them, were invasions of God's prerogative, and therefore strictly forbidden. But the internal worship and reverence of the heart, is here chiefly forbidden to be given to images; for this is to make them Gods, and to give the glory due to God only, to the works of men's hands, which is idolatry to be abhorred by all Christians. And not only the worshipping of images, but of God by them, is here prohibited. The worshipping of false Gods, is the idolatry condemned in the first commandment. The worshipping the true God in a false way, is the idolatry forbidden in this. The ruder and more barbarous nations that mistook the object of worship, and paid it to stocks and stones, were guilty of the former; some of the wiser and more knowing among the heathen, who when *they knew God, yet glorified him not as God,* were guilty of the latter. These two are in scripture filed idolaters; as we read in the first chapter to the Romans, where these wiser heathens are charged with it, because though they knew God, by the creation of the world, yet they worshipped him in a way unsuitable to his nature, namely, by images and corporeal resemblances of him, *changing his glory into the similitude of men, beasts, and birds.* And though they did not terminate their worship in the images, but only served God by them, it being impossible for the wiser part of them to take that for a God, or maker of the world, which they either made with their own hands, or saw made with their own eyes; yet their worshipping of God this way, so unworthy of him, is in scripture called idolatry. The papists, who worship God much after the same manner, and have recourse to the same distinctions, to screen themselves, ought seriously to consider this. It is most certain, that there is a peculiar and incommunicable piece of homage due to the great Creator of all things, upon the account of his infinite and adorable perfections, and our great

obligations to him. This is what we call divine worship, and is challenged by God himself in the Old Testament, and confined to him, by our Saviour, in the New, in those words; *thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve:* and though those who worship images, and other things, would excuse it, by making these things not the object of worship, but only means and helps to direct it to God himself; yet it is to be feared, that much more goes to the image than to God. To prevent which I shall proceed in the next place, to consider the sanction by which this prohibition is enforced. And that is taken partly from God Almighty's jealousy and tenderness for his honour; *I the Lord thy God, am a jealous God;* and partly from his just indignation, and severe punishment of those who violate and invade it: *visiting the iniquities of the fathers upon the children, unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me.*

The jealousy of God ought to be a sufficient argument to deter any from offering him this kind of affront or indignity. For if the jealousy of a man is justly to be dreaded, by all who give occasion for it, because it stirs up his highest resentment, for any violation of his honour, and arms him with a more than ordinary courage to vindicate it; certainly the jealousy of God, who is tender of his honour, and so able to repair it, is much more to be dreaded by all who wilfully invade it.

That God is thus tender and jealous, impatient of any rival, and will admit of none to participate with him in the love and honour he requires from us, we learn from the prophet Isaiah; *I am the Lord, this is my name, and my glory will I not give to another, nor my praise to graven images.* The jealousy here ascribed to God, must not be taken for such a vexatious, disquieting passion, as is wont to ruffle and discompose mankind, for that is inconsistent with the divine nature; but must be understood by way of accommodation and similitude to our understanding. The Hebrew word in the original signifies a strong, as well as a jealous God: importing that he is able to vindicate his honour, and will certainly punish all injuries offered to it. Jealousy of itself without strength is but an impotent and contemptible passion, but when armed with an almighty power, is justly terrible;

rible; and therefore Moses in this very precept about images, tells the Israelites, *the Lord thy God is a consuming fire, he is a jealous God*; and elsewhere brings in God, thus declaring, *they have moved me to jealousy, with that which is not God, they have provoked me to anger with their vanities; a fire is kindled in mine anger, and shall burn to the lowest hell, and shall consume the earth with her increase, and set on fire the foundations of the mountains*. Let me then ask of all, whose hearts and affections stray from their maker, *do we provoke the Lord to jealousy, are we stronger than he?* can our heart bear up, or our hands be strong in the day that he shall visit us? no; *it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God*. And yet that will be our case, if we forsake God, and follow idols. Which leads me to another part of the sanction of this law, taken from the justice of God, in punishing the breakers of it, in those words; *visiting the iniquities of the fathers upon the children, to the third and fourth generation of them that hate me*. To visit is sometimes taken in a good sense, for beholding another with an eye of pity and compassion; in which sense David prays, *visit me, O Lord, with thy salvation*. Sometimes in a bad sense, for looking on with an eye of fury and revenge, and visiting with judgments and calamities; which is the meaning in this place, where God threatens to punish the offenders against this law, both in their persons and posterity. And he *visits this iniquity upon the fathers themselves*; of this kind the holy scriptures afford many examples, God executing his judgments upon idolatries, and frequently punishing his own people, when they revolted from him, and set up their molten images.

He also *visits this iniquity of the fathers upon the children*; this we find verified in many of the kings of Israel and Judah, who for their idolatry were punished not only in their own persons, but in their posterity; God *recompensing the iniquity of the fathers into the bosom of their children after them*, and that *to the third and fourth generation*; those being generations which a man may live to see. And as the prosperity of children is one of the greatest comforts of human life, and all parents delight to behold such flourishing branches of their own; so to see them in misery and trouble, is a melancholy heart-breaking.

And therefore Almighty God, to deter men from transgressing this law, denounces vengeance against the posterity of such as break it, threatening their *children to the third and fourth generation*, and punishing their idolatries, through the whole line they are capable of seeing. By which it appears that sinners entail a curse upon their offspring, and make the children miserable by their impieties.—But how can it consist, (some will say) with the justice and goodness of God, to punish the children for the sins of their parents? especially he having declared, that *the soul that sinneth, shall die; and the son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, nor the father the iniquity of the son; but the righteousness of the righteous shall be upon him, and the wickedness of the wicked upon him*. Now to this the answer is easy and obvious. For God's visiting the sins of the fathers upon the children, is always upon supposition of their making their fathers sins their own; by imitating their ill examples, and treading in the steps of their impieties; for so God himself tells them, *if your children forsake my law, and walk not in my statutes, I will visit their transgressions with a rod, and their sins with scourges: but, if the son forsake the iniquities of his father, he shall not die, he shall surely live, saith the Lord*. God never visits the sins of the fathers upon penitent and reforming children; but if they imitate their fathers wickedness, it is but just and righteous, that they suffer for them: in which case, they are punished not for their fathers sins, but their own. And because idolatrous parents are too apt to corrupt their children by their own evil counsel and example, therefore Almighty God, to deter them from it, threatens to punish the fathers in their children; which he may as well do, as in their houses and estates, or any thing belonging to them: for children are part of the goods and substance of the parents, who are deeply concerned in their welfare or misery; and therefore God may justly visit them, in those dearest pledges, if they mislead them into their impieties. In which case he doth not so much make their children suffer the punishment of their fathers sin, as the fathers suffer for their own. Almighty God may, and often doth, visit the iniquities of the fathers upon their children with temporal punishments; but then though the calamity be the child's, yet the punishment

nishment is properly the father's: he is wounded in one of the nearest and tenderest parts of himself, though it may work together for good to the repenting child. Indeed God never visits the father's sins upon the children with eternal punishment; in which sense every one must bear his own burden; but he justly may and doth with temporal evils, for the correction and amendment of both. But who are the persons against whom this threat is denounced? why them that hate him; that is, those who transgress his laws. For as the loving God is expressed by keeping his commandments, so the breaking them is stiled hating of him. But idolaters and the worshippers of images are more especially called haters of God. For as the adulterers shew her hatred and contempt of her husband, by giving herself to the embraces of another; so they who follow their own inventions, and give that worship to images, which is due only to God, cast off the love of God, and may be truly said to hate him. Having thus considered the negative part of this precept, which forbids the making and worshipping of images, I proceed to the affirmative, as to what is required of us; and that is to worship God, after a due manner, in a way suitable to his nature and will.

This commandment requires us to serve God suitable to his nature; not by images or corporeal resemblances, for he having no bodily parts, cannot be represented in any bodily shape, and which to attempt, is a great debasement to his infinite majesty and glory: but he being a spiritual essence must be served with spiritual worship, and so our Saviour declares, *God is a spirit, and they that worship him, must worship him in spirit and truth*. For the better understanding whereof, it should be observed, that the worshipping of God in spirit and truth, doth not exclude all bodily worship, nor yet the use of rites and ceremonies; neither of which are inconsistent with spiritual worship. To worship him then in spirit and truth, is to worship him with our spirits, and not with the tongue only; it is to draw nigh to him with our hearts, and not barely with our lips; and to serve him truly and sincerely, in opposition to all feigned, formal, and hypocritical service. In short, to serve him suitably to his nature, is to have our affections raised towards him,

in a way becoming his several attributes; that is, to love him for his goodness, to fear him for his greatness, to trust on him for his faithfulness, and to honour him for all his divine and adorable perfections. Again,

To worship God rightly, is the doing it agreeable to his will, as well as suitable to his nature; we must serve him according to his own direction and appointment; for divine worship being that homage, which we as creatures owe to our great creator, it is but just that we should worship him after the manner he has commanded; which not to do, is to declaim his authority, and to be governed only by our own will. But may nothing be done in the worship of God, unless expressly commanded by him? To answer this truly, a distinction ought to be made, between the substantial parts of divine worship, and the accidental, or alterable circumstances thereof. As for the substantial part of religion, consisting of all that is necessary to be believed or done in order to salvation, that requires the express precept and revelation of God, without which nothing is to be so esteemed. For he best knows how he will be served; and having declared his mind in the holy scriptures, they ought to be the rule and standard of our duty: since to add thereto, would be to charge it with imperfection, and to make a new religion of our own. But as for the circumstantial part of divine worship, such as time, place, gesture, and the like, these not being particularly determined by God in the holy scripture, are in a great measure left to every one's discretion in their private worship, and to the prudence and authority of superiors in the public service of the church, whom we ought to obey in such things; so as care be taken, that the rites and ceremonies enjoined, are suitable to those general rules of order, decency, and edification, prescribed by God, and becoming his service; and that they are not enjoined and observed, as essential parts of worship, or necessary to salvation, for that would be to add to the substance of religion, and to teach for doctrine the commandments of men; but only as outward circumstances, for the order and decency of public worship, and as things that may vary, as times, places, and other occasions may require.

The

The worship of God then, recommended in this command, is both internal and external. By the former is meant, the worship of our hearts and souls, whereby we inwardly admire and adore his divine excellencies; esteeming, loving, and fearing him, as our great creator and best benefactor: and this not in pretence and appearance only, but in sincerity; *not in words or in tongue, but in deed and in truth*, from the very bottom of the heart. By the latter is meant the worship of the body, or when we express the inward reverence of the mind by the outward humble gestures of the body; which God frequently calls for, and David exhorts us to in these words, *O come let us worship and fall down and kneel before the Lord our maker*. This is what some expositors of this commandment have thought to be here principally intended; making the internal worship of the soul to be required in the first commandment, and the external worship of the body to be commanded in this. And as God forbids the bowing down, or giving any bodily worship to graven images, so he requires this and other gestures of bodily adoration to be given to himself. But because all humble gestures and acts of bodily reverence have been despised by some, and too much neglected by others, it may not be improper to recommend and enforce this external bodily worship. Let it then be considered,

That God claims this external worship as due to himself, and threatens to punish such as give it to others. He here forbids the bowing or falling down to any graven images, as an invasion of his prerogative, and declares that the prostituting of our bodies as well as souls to them, will stir up his jealousy. How sharply are the Israelites reprov'd for bowing the knee to Baal; and the idolatry of the heathen is frequently expressed in scripture, by their *serving other gods, and bowing down unto them*. Again, Almighty God created the body as well as the soul, and united them together for his service, and therefore he expects the homage of both. Indeed, the service of the heart is what he principally demands and regards; *My son, give me thy heart*; that being the best offering we can make to a spiritual immaterial Being, without which all other service is but dead and ineffectual. But yet he expects the humility and adoration

of the outward man; he calls for the ear, to hear instruction; for the eyes to be lifted up in prayer; for the tongue to speak the praises of our maker; in a word, he expects that our whole man should bow with the profoundest awe and reverence to him, before he will bow his ear, and be inclined to hear us; and justly too, *for it is he that made us, and not we ourselves*, and therefore all the members of our bodies ought to be employed and devoted to his service. And as our bodies as well as souls partake of the benefits of Christ's redemption, so should both be dedicated to him, and join together in his service. The apostle tells us, we are not our own, to dispose and order ourselves, as we please; but *being bought with a price, we are to glorify God in our bodies, and in our spirits, which are his*. Lastly, we hope to be glorified hereafter, in our bodies as well as souls, and therefore both ought to glorify him here. Many and great things are said concerning the future felicities of our bodies, in particular that they shall be fashioned like unto *Christ's glorious body*. And if they are to be crowned with such invaluable blessings hereafter, it is but reasonable, by engaging them in his service here, that we should prepare and fit them for the next world.

Thus we see what is required of us in this commandment; namely, to raise our minds above all gross sense and fancy in our adorations of our Maker; not framing any outward images or resemblances to worship him by; nor forming any false notions or misrepresentations of him, by thinking him such a one as ourselves: but we are here commanded to entertain high and worthy thoughts of him, conceiving of him as a Being transcendently perfect, infinitely superior to all, in goodness, justice, wisdom, and power; and as such to be loved, feared, trusted and honoured above all; and to direct all our service to him with such apprehensions. This is to worship him in spirit and truth. And the body as well as the mind is to be employed in these adorations. The negative precept here, *thou shalt not bow down to a graven image*, includes the contrary positive duty, *thou shalt bow down to the Lord thy God*; meaning, that we ought to worship God with our body, as well as our mind. This commandment then as much requires us to bow down and kneel, and give bodily worship unto God,

God, as it forbids us to give it to a graven image. And the practice of holy men in all ages hath been agreeable hereto, who have been as forward to do the one, as to refuse the other. In the Old Testament we find the people of God always using a posture of reverence in the worship of God, by standing, kneeling, or prostrating themselves. In the New Testament, we find our blessed Saviour and his disciples, in all their prayers unto God, either bowing, kneeling, or prostrating themselves before him; which is that glorifying of God with their bodies, enjoined and practised by them. Indeed, the inward reverence and devotion of the mind, will always draw after it this outward reverence of the body; and therefore the whole worship of God is represented in scripture by these external visible acts of adoration. Hence bowing and kneeling unto God is generally in scripture used to signify the worshipping him. *O come let us worship and fall down, and kneel before the Lord our Maker. Where-with shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before the High God?* This therefore is here required to be paid unto God and no other, and that because he is a jealous God, infinitely tender of his honour, and impatient of any competitor in this incommunicable homage, belonging to him. Again, he threatens to visit *the iniquities of the fathers upon the children to the fourth generation*, who thus invade and defraud him of his honour; that is, their posterity shall fare the worse for it, their children's children shall be capable of less favour, and be more strictly and severely dealt with on this account. The justice whereof has been before vindicated.

Lastly, to encourage the observance of this law, he adds, that he will *show mercy unto thousands of them that love him, and keep his commandments*. Not that he will forbear to punish the offending children of good men; no, we find him declaring, *that if their children forsake his law, and keep not his commandments, he will visit their transgressions with a rod, and their sin with scourges; nevertheless (saith he) my loving kindness will I not utterly take from them*. That is, he will deal more favourably with them for their parents sake. The misdeeds of some shall not interrupt his kindness to the rest of their posterity, or blot out the memory of their goodness. This we find verified

in the posterity of Abraham, and the other patriarchs, in whom Almighty God overlooked many and great provocations for their sake, mixing mercy with severity, and setting them at last in the promised land. And here we may observe the vast difference and disproportion, between the proceedings of God in the way of justice and in the way of mercy: *he visiteth the iniquities of disobedient parents, to the third and fourth generation; but, he sheweth mercy to a thousand generations*, of those who obey him. He soon forgets the wrongs done him, but keeps our good works in everlasting remembrance. Which should teach us not only to imitate him therein, but encourage us to serve and obey so good a master. And lest any should vainly expect these instances of divine goodness, without observing the commands annexed to them, the last words of the commandment confine them wholly to those, *that love God and keep his commandments*. As the revolvers from God were before stiled haters of him, so they who obey his laws, are here said to love him. *He that hath my commandments and keepeth them, (saith our Saviour) he it is that loveth me*. And elsewhere, *if any man love me, he will keep my word*.

To conclude then, we may learn from this commandment the happiness of descending from good parents, who bequeath a blessing, and derive a mercy upon their offspring to many generations. And the unhappiness and sad misfortune of such as are born of disobedient parents, who entail misery and a curse upon their whole posterity: which should teach us, not only for our own, but our children's sake, to be ever mindful of keeping God's laws, and very tender of breaking them.

SERMON XXIX.

By BISHOP BEVERIDGE.

The Third Commandment.

Exod. xx. 7.

Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God, &c.

THE dreadful solemnity, with which the ten commandments were delivered by God to Moses, from Mount Sinai,

was

was a sight so terrible, that Moses himself said, I exceedingly fear and quake. And the people, when they saw the fire, black darkness and tempest, and heard the thunder, the trumpet and voice of God, *they removed and stood afar off, and said to Moses, speak thou with us, and we will hear; but let not God speak with us, lest we die.* Imagine, therefore, that we heard the voice of God proclaiming loud in our ears, from the midst of glorious, and yet dreadful fire, lightnings, thunder, and the sound of trumpets, *Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain, for the Lord will not hold him guiltless, that taketh his name in vain.* Had we this thought frequently in our minds, who could dare to prophane the sacred name of God, by oaths, curses, blasphemies, and dreadful execrations, on every slight and frivolous occasion, as is now the common practice?—To preserve, then, the innocent, and reclaim those who are guilty of this wicked custom, I will first consider the meaning of the words, and then make use of such reasons and arguments, as may be proper to dissuade men from it.

To take the name of God in vain, is, in the literal sense, to use the sacred name of God, lightly and commonly, to vain, idle, needless, and insignificant purposes, though we do not swear by it, or call God to witness the truth of what we say. To have that name often in our mouths, on every trifling occasion, shews that we have not an awful respect for him in our hearts. This is the beginning of evil, and generally prepares the way to swearing. We should therefore, at first, hinder children and young persons from using familiarly and commonly the name of God. This will beget reverence to it, and restrain the abuse. They should be checked and punished when they call on God, either at their play, work, or on any occasion, but what is serious. By constantly doing this, we should stop one common inlet to this wicked practice. If we thus discharge our duty to our children and servants, it will put us in mind also of our own neglect and failings; for by reminding them not to take the name of God in vain, we shall be ashamed to be guilty of it ourselves. I fear the frequent practice of abusing the name of God, by parents, masters, and mistresses, gives

occasion to children and servants to do the same; and is the reason why they dare not reprove and punish them for so offending. But sad must be the case of those, who are afraid to do their duty to their children and servants, when yet they shall be severely punished by God for not doing it. Let such consider, that though they are exceeding culpable themselves in this point, yet that they still ought to reprove and punish those who are under their care for the like offences: because they will thereby do their own duty, prevent a great deal of mischief, and avoid being guilty of the sins of others. But to take the name of God in vain, is most properly, to swear either rashly, without heed and reverence, on any just and weighty occasion; or falsely, without regard to truth, not knowing whether what we say is true or not.

There are some who think, that if people do not mention the sacred name of God in their asseverations, they are not guilty of taking God's name in vain, though they swear by any thing or creature else. But whoever considers, what our Saviour said to the scribes and pharisees, concerning swearing, will find the relation every thing and creature in the world has to their Great Creator, is so close and dependent, that he who swears by the one, does also swear by the other. He who swears by the altar, offering, or temple, swears by him, to whom that altar is erected, to whom that offering is made, and to whom that temple, with its service, is devoted, that is, to God. He who swears by heaven, swears by him who governs therein. He who swears by the earth, swears by him whose footstool it is, who made and preserves it. He who swears by Jerusalem, does it by the great God whose city it was. He who swears by his head, the fountain of life, swears by him who made it; in whose hands is the power of life and death. So that people may swear, without using the name of God, and consequently may offend against this commandment without literally taking the name of the Lord their God in vain. Let none then satisfy themselves, with any such idle distinction, as to imagine they do not swear, unless they pronounce the sacred name of God, when they do it by other things. Indeed, it is better to swear by any thing that does not immediately relate

late to God, than by his sacred name; because it creates less horror, gives less offence, and is not so bad an example. For though all oaths are very bad, yet some are much worse and more wicked than others.

The guilt, then, of taking God's name in vain, may be contracted, by swearing by any thing that has relation to God, though his name is not directly used; and therefore all sorts of oaths are comprehended under the third commandment; which contains a prohibition of all light rash oaths in our conversation, as well as false oaths, whether in private company, or public courts of judicature, before the magistrate. I shall now only consider all light and rash oaths, whether true or false, hurtful or idle: for the name of God is despised and profaned, if used on slight occasions, though what we swear be true; because the thing was not worthy so much weight as an oath usually requires. And that no one is to swear in light trivial concerns, will appear, by considering the nature of an oath.

An oath is a most religious thing; we acknowledge by it God's omniscience and omnipotence, and declare, that he knows the very secrets of our hearts; that he can and will punish us, if what we affirm is not true, or that we intend not to perform what we then promise. An oath is the solemn calling on God to bear witness, that what we utter with our mouths, we in our hearts believe to be exactly true; and entreating him to punish and take vengeance on us, if we intend not what we say and promise. The heart of man lies secret to all the world; that therefore we may know whether a man speaks true or false, an oath was appointed; by which we appeal to God as a witness, that our heart and mouth agree; or if they do not, it implies, that we desire God to take vengeance on us, and punish our impiety to him, and falsehood to man. Can any thing be more serious and religious than a solemn oath? So that every time we take an oath by any thing relating to God, we call God to witness the truth of what we say, and to revenge himself on us, if it be false. Let all then remember the serious nature of an oath, and consider, whether it should be used on such light and frivolous occasions, as is too generally done by men, though what they swear is true. It is an awful

thing to call on the great God of heaven and earth, the maker and preserver of us all, on whose will we alone depend for every moment of our lives. How dare we then require him to attest and witness matters of such small concern, as we should be ashamed to desire of any serious neighbour? An oath is to make an end of strife, and for confirmation of truth; but then it ought to be a truth of weight and importance that such strife is about. Every allowable oath should be taken, *in truth, judgment, and righteousness*; with the heart, with the understanding, and good conscience; in order to discover the truth, that judgment may be righteously administered. Where none of those good ends are answered, the name of God is not to be sworn by. Did men examine their past oaths, they would soon find, how few were sworn in truth, judgment, and righteousness; how few tended to discover any truth of importance, or contributed to do justice, or to promote righteousness. It would then appear, that every oath, except those sworn before a magistrate, was taken vainly, lightly, rashly, presumptuously, and wickedly; so far from doing any good, that they are matter of shame, humiliation, and repentance, before God.

Remember also, that such light, rash, and presumptuous oaths, are not only improper and indecent, but are most solemnly forbidden by God; who says to every one,—*thou shalt not take the name of God in vain*. Would God himself descend from heaven, with such solemnity, as you have heard, to forbid the taking his name in vain, had it not been of the greatest moment and importance to us? It is only for our advantage here and hereafter, that God instructs us in his will, and tells us what to do, and avoid, in order to his blessing and making us happy. Did we spend every day in oaths, curses, and profaning God's holy name and word, it would not interrupt his happiness; but it will hurt ourselves, and everlastingly destroy both our bodies and souls, not to comply with his will and commands. For these oaths will some time or other be avenged by God, *who will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain*. If not guiltless, then, to be sure, we shall be held guilty of the violation and breach of God's laws, and liable to the punishment due to such offenders and notorious crimes.

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What particular punishments such are obnoxious to in this life, is not declared; but their sin is so provoking and presumptuous, and has so little temptation to it, that they have much both to apprehend and fear. The prophet tells us, *because of swearing the land mourneth*, the land was then afflicted with several plagues and heavy judgments, by reason of the frequent oaths and perjuries among the people. And I dare say, many among us are afflicted, blasted, and undone, by this audacious contempt and profanation of God's name, who little think from whence the curse and secret canker came. And how should it be otherwise? will God bless those who daily take his name in vain, defy his laws, and curse him to his face; who call for vengeance on themselves and others, almost every word they say? Can they expect a blessing, who scarce ever mention God, but in the way of blasphemy; and make few other prayers than for plagues and mischiefs, damnation and eternal wrath? How merciful is God, that he does not grant what these poor wretches so earnestly ask him? But let such be assured, that without sincere repentance and leaving off their sin, however God may forbear them in this world, he will most certainly, according to their own curses and repeated wishes, condemn and confound them in the world to come. Those prayers that came from hell, which pleased their ears and filled their mouths so often, shall be heard, to send them to accompany those cursed spirits, on whom they have so frequently called. Let them then remember, that it is a dreadful thing, to fall into the hands of the living God; who has declared, *he will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain*.

If then we reflect on what has been said,—That an oath is a most sacred, serious, and solemn act of religion, intended by God for the confirmation of truth, the doing justice and judgment to all men, and to put an end to strife—That it is a most indecent, unseemly thing, to apply such serious and religious affirmations, as oaths are, to light, trivial words, and matters of no weight and moment—That all such oaths are utterly forbidden by God's express command, and that the breach thereof will as surely be avenged by him, as God is true, who said it. If all these things are

duly considered, common swearing can never be so harmless and innocent, as some seem to imagine. And if not, how ought we most seriously to repent of it? These considerations nearly concern us, as people that pretend to believe in God, that acknowledge the divine authority of the scriptures, and profess ourselves Christians. There is no answering any of these arguments; no one pretends to justify their practice of swearing, either from scripture, reason, or the authority of wise and good men. Is it not then strange, that what is so impossible to be excused, or justified, should yet so generally obtain? That what every one condemns in himself and others, should be suffered to prevail and reign, as it were without controul? Especially if we further

Remember, that there is neither pleasure nor profit to be reaped from this ungodly practice. They who are most addicted to swearing, can give no reason why they so often commit this abominable sin; they freely acknowledge, that there is in it neither pleasure nor advantage. Other sins have one, if not both these temptations, to captivate mankind; they either satisfy some sensual appetite, or gratify some covetous desire or profit; at least they hope to find their account in it. But the swearer gives away his soul for nothing. Of all offenders he makes the worst bargain, gives himself up to everlasting pains and sorrows for that which no one advised or tempted him to, nor approved of; and which he himself never liked whilst doing, nor remembered afterwards with any satisfaction or content. Let any one call to mind the many oaths and profanations of God's holy name he has been guilty of, and see if he is either the richer, wiser, or better esteemed. And who would continue in a practice that brings with it neither pleasure nor advantage? Indeed, *what shall it profit a man to gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?* But it is still worse to lose his soul for nothing. In all other offences, men aim at some end, and have some motives and temptation thereto; but in this there is no end or temptation, so that a man is condemned by himself and every other person. Besides, it is a practice that all condemn in their wives and children, their servants and relations. Who would

not stand amazed, be angry and ashamed, to hear their wives and children answer them with oaths on all occasions, and mingle blasphemies and curses in their common discourses? And yet the laws of God allow it no more in the one than the other. No sex, nor age, nor person of any degree, can pretend to a privilege of offending God.

Neither wife nor children will be excused before God, for following the evil example of husband and father; because all should live by the rule of God's law, and not by any one's example. But yet it is certain, that he shall be punished, who gives such an ill example to wife and children. And what a sort of hell must there be in that house, where every one despises God, and tramples under feet his laws, and none left to reprove, or intercede with God, for his mercy and forbearance towards a family so wicked and prophane. These are some of the most proper arguments which occur, to dissuade all from light and rash swearing. They are such as our own sense and reason may and will suggest. And the condemnation of the guilty will be the greater, as they in their own hearts and consciences know all the reasons and arguments against swearing, as much as the most learned; and therefore want not to be instructed in the duty, so much as to be reminded of what they before knew.

Let then such as have been guilty of this wicked practice, sincerely repent, ask God's forgiveness, and beg the assistance of his grace, to keep them from falling into it for the future. Let us all carefully watch over ourselves, that we speak not hastily and unadvisedly with our lips; remembering God is always present, and hears every word. Let us not on every trifling occasion, give way to anger, which is the parent of many oaths. The least opposition to our judgment, or contradiction to our will, is often a provocation to curse and blaspheme God's holy name; as if that would mend and make things better. Those who are given to swearing should above all things avoid drinking and gaming. If such when they are sober, serious, and in their senses, can hardly forbear swearing, how can it be expected that they should, when they have lost their reason, and are little less than mad? They who

abhor an oath when sober, will yet courageously swear if intoxicated with liquor; such therefore should by all means avoid an excess, that so naturally and easily provokes to passion. And as to gaming, there are few that follow it, but what swear excessively; few that lose their money, but also lose their patience and temper. Gaming is one of the most destructive vices men can fall into, and provokes to the greatest anger. It ruins most men at last, and is worse in mean and poor people than the rich; because it excessively wastes that time which they can poorly spare from the care and labour which is necessary to support themselves and families; and spends that small substance which should supply their wives and children with necessaries of life. Lastly, it occasions oaths and curses, blasphemies and dreadful execrations in a most fearful manner; and therefore whoever would avoid swearing, and taking the name of God in vain, must shun gaming, though but for trifles.

And next to the preventing this wicked practice in ourselves, we should endeavour to promote the glory of God, by doing good to others. When our neighbours are apt to swear, we should calmly tell them, we would sooner believe them without an oath; and when they find we deal thus christianly and friendly by them, they will be more on their guard. Those who are more immediately under our care, and depend on us, we may be more free with; even to reprove and punish such as are guilty of dishonouring God. Let us not suffer our children to swear, without our anger and immediate chastisement; nor keep any servant that is guilty of this wicked practice; for God will not bless their labours. Let us employ no workmen who will not do their business without swearing; nor relieve no poor, who thus offend God. Were we to take these courses, we should in a little time, see a great change and reformation of manners. This was formerly the sin of the rich, the easy, and thoughtless great men of the world; but now the poorer sort do by this sin of swearing the most provoke God. Is it not a strange and amazing thing, to hear people swear at the plow, at their horses, and cattle, and any thing that comes in their way? People that depend on the blessing of God for their daily bread, are hourly provoking

provoking him, to blast and confound them. Ought not such persons to be made more sensible of their duty, and to pay more honour to their constant heavenly Benefactor? shall they less fear to defy their Maker, and despise their Redeemer, than to speak disrespectfully of their superiors, parents, or masters? Let me then hope, desire, and pray, that the sense of God's honour, the sense of his command, the sense of our duty, and the danger we run, by committing this sin of swearing, may influence us to consideration, repentance, and amendment; that so we may be ever restrained from *taking the name of the Lord our God in vain*; always remembering, *that he will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain.*

SERMON XXX.

By BISHOP BURNET.

The Fourth Commandment.

EXOD. XX. 8, 9, 10, 11.

Remember the sabbath day to keep it holy. Six days shalt thou labour, and do all thy work; but the seventh day is the sabbath of the Lord, &c.

THIS is one of the ten commandments which God delivered from Mount Sinai, by the hand of Moses, to the people of Israel. It is the last of the first table, and is a fence to the observance of the three former; as the last in the second table, *thou shalt not covet*, is to all that precede it. For if the heart is restrained from inordinate desires and passions, it will be easy to abstain from the sins forbidden in the other commandments. And if we *sanctify the Lord's day*, by reflecting seriously on the majesty and attributes of that great God, who *made the heavens and earth*, this will give us such impressions of him, as to preserve us from worshipping any other God, or from worshipping the true God by any image. *For to whom can we liken him*, that made all things of nothing? This will also preserve in us such an awe of him, as that we shall think and speak of him with reverence and godly fear; and will effec-

tually restrain us from all vain oaths, but most of all from swearing falsely, which is one of the highest indignities that can be offered to his holy and great name.

Religion is, or ought to be, the great and constant business of our whole lives. Indeed as our bodies require so many things of us, that they must have a large share of time and thought, and so they would soon engross all, and the sense of religion would be quite lost in the world, if there were not some set times appropriated for the remembrance of it, and for the solemn worship of God. Public worship is necessary to preserve mankind from falling into atheism on the one hand, and into idolatry on the other. Since if men were only to worship God alone, and apart, it would be more easy for them either to neglect it quite, or to corrupt it according to their various fancies, than when companies and bodies of men assemble and meet together. For the maintaining and advancing the true ends of religion, it is therefore necessary to have times appointed for the service of God; and that on certain days, there should be public assemblies of such numbers of men, as can conveniently be brought together in one place. This is also a great means for preserving union, peace, and love in the world. But these days should not return so seldom, as to have the sense of religion, which is raised in us one day, to be quite worn off before another returns. Our minds, that are apt to be unsteady and forgetful, must be frequently refreshed, with the remembrance of those things which relate to God, in order to govern our lives and actions; and which will restrain us from sinning against God, and excite us to all the acts of virtue and godliness. Yet, on the other hand, since our bodies have so many necessities that cannot be relieved without much hard labour, it was also necessary that such days for the service of God, should not return too often; lest there should be such frequent interruptions thereby given to our affairs, as to hinder and prevent the business of life. God, therefore, the master of all our time, having made us and all things about us for our use; who is a gentle master, and lays on us no yoke but what is easy, and who knows best what our natures can bear, and what is most fit both for body and mind, has

here commanded that the seventh day shall be kept holy, that is, separated from the common business of life, and dedicated to his service. And that God might give this commandment, which is so necessary a means for preserving religion in the world, the more authority, though he could at once have perfected the whole order of the creation, yet he chose rather to do it in a course of six days, than all at once; which being finished, he rested on the seventh day, that by so great an example, the observation of a rest on that day might be recommended with the more authority to all mankind.

There are indeed other words added in the fifth of Deuteronomy, to those in the text; as, *Remember thou wast a servant in the land of Egypt, and that the Lord thy God brought thee out thence, through a mighty hand, and by a stretched out arm; therefore the Lord thy God commanded thee to keep the sabbath day.* These words indeed related to the Jews only, and so were a more particular enforcement of it on them; but the consideration of the rest after the creation, is universal, and regards all mankind; it being a true rule, that all laws are to be extended, as far as the reason of them goes. But there having been some disputes and controversies concerning the sabbath, for the satisfaction of the scrupulous, I will more particularly consider its primitive institution, its morality and perpetual obligation, its change from the last to the first day of the week, and the manner how we ought to sanctify it.

As to the institution of the sabbath, there is a difference between learned men. Some refer its beginning to the promulgation of the law, or at farthest to the sending of manna to the Israelites; grounding their notion upon this, that till then we do not read in all the history of the patriarchs and first ages of the world, of any sabbath observed and sanctified by the fathers of those days, which would not have been neglected had any such command been given. Others, who to me seem nearer the truth, place its origin so high as the creation of the world, from these words, *On the seventh day God ended his work which he had made; and God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it.* Here God is said to sanctify the day when he rested; which was precisely on the

seventh day after the creation. So that the sabbath is one day younger than man, ordained for him in his state of innocence, that his faculties being then holy and excellent, he might employ them, especially on that day, in the spiritual worship of God his creator. And although we find no more mention of the sabbath, until Moses had conducted the children of Israel in the wilderness, which was about 2450 years after the creation, yet it is not to be supposed, that among the people of God, who were very careful in observing the law, and delivering it to their posterity, that the observation thereof in keeping this day, utterly ceased; but rather was continued among those who feared God, till again invigorated with new authority from mount Sinai.

With respect to the morality of the sabbath, it ought to be observed, that those things are said to be moral and of the law of nature, which are in themselves rational and fit to be done, though there was no express command to enjoin it. So that where there is a great equity in the thing itself, enough to sway a rational and honest man to the doing it; this is to be esteemed moral, and authorized by the law of nature. That is of positive institution, which is observed only because it is commanded, and hath no intrinsic goodness, or reason in itself to recommend it to our practice, but obligeth only upon the injunction and authority of another; as for instance, it is naturally good to obey our parents, to abstain from murder, theft, adultery; and to do unto others, as we would like to have done unto us. These things we are obliged unto by the very light of reason and principle of nature, though there had been no written law of God to impose them. But then there were other things to which God obliged some of his people, that had nothing to recommend them besides the authority of his commands; such were the various ceremonies under the law. The first are therefore most properly called moral and natural commands, the last positive and instituted. The former are commanded because good, the latter are good because commanded. However, certain it is, that a convenient portion of our time is due unto the service and worship of God, by natural and moral right. For surely it is but fit and reasonable that

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God should have some part of our life and time, who created us on purpose that we might serve and glorify him. And could we ourselves, had it been left to us, have set apart less time for his service, than God hath done? Indeed the law of nature doth not dictate to us any particular day, one more than another, for the worship of God; so that without the positive command of God, one day is not better than another. And therefore there is a memento prefixed to this command, *remember that thou keep holy the sabbath day*, which is not added to any other precept; intimating to us, that the observation of a particular day is not a dictate of nature, but a positive law imposed by God; and which, had it not been revealed, we should not have been obliged to observe it. Hence this command may be called moral-positive; moral, in that it requires a due portion of our time to be dedicated to the service and worship of God; positive, in that it prescribes the seventh day for that purpose, which the light of nature did not prefix.

We are then evidently as much bound to keep a sabbath as the Jews were, though not to the exact circumstances of the day. Nay, this command was obligatory, even in paradise itself, in the state of innocency, and therefore contains nothing in it unworthy the state of a Christian; for it is no ceremonial command, nor one of those which were typical of Christ, and abolished at his coming; but there still lies a strict and indispensable obligation upon us, to observe a sabbath holy to the Lord. The reasons of this command are all of them moral and perpetual, and therefore oblige us Christians. The equity is the same to us as it was to them, that we should allow one day in seven to the worship of that God who so liberally allows us six for our ordinary affairs. The ease and refreshment of our bodies, from the labours of our calling, is now as necessary as it was then; and we are still as much obliged with thankfulness to remember and meditate upon the great mercy of our creation, as they were. And therefore, if these were sufficient reasons why the Jews should observe a particular sabbath, they are still forcible and cogent to bind us. But though the sanctifying of a sabbath be thus obligatory to Christians, yet it is

not the sabbath-day that the Jews and the people of God, before Christ's coming into the world, were bound to observe, that we are to keep. For it is with good reason and upon good authority changed from the last day of the week to the first; from Saturday to Sunday, called now the Lord's day, because it was the day of the week on which our Lord and Saviour rose from the dead; in memory of which, and as a thankful acknowledgment of the great mercy of our redemption, fully completed by his resurrection, the sabbath hath been translated to this day, and is now celebrated thereon by all the churches of Christ. And this change of the sabbath is the next thing I proposed to consider.

And as the first institution of the sabbath was by divine authority, so is the change thereof. For as God rested from his labour on the last day of the week, so did Christ from all his sorrows and afflictions on the first, when he had fully completed the work of our redemption. Christ not only sanctified this day by his resurrection, and the Apostles confirmed the observation of it by their writings and practice; but the Apostles themselves required the first Christians to meet together on the first day of the week; which was at that time honoured with the name of the Lord's day, and has been ever since in all ages of the christian church observed as the day dedicated to the service and worship of God, and to the celebrating of our Lord's resurrection on that day from the dead, to whom he *gave all power both in heaven and earth*.

Having thus opened to you the ends of this commandment, and the reasons for the change made in the day, I proceed in the last place to consider the manner of sanctifying this day aright, so as to avoid extremes on all sides. We must then remember, that the *sabbath was made for man, and not man for the sabbath*; and that it is lawful to do good on the sabbath day. The Jews, to whom this commandment was frequently repeated in terms that imported much strictness, and a great severity on those that transgressed it, at last raised the observation of it to a superstitious niceness. They came, as most hypocrites are apt to do, to place all religion in those outward performances, that had an appear-

ance of great exactness in obeying the law punctually; and therefore they took occasion from the miracle that our Saviour wrought on the sabbath day, and from his disciples plucking some ears of corn when they were hungry, to represent him as one that profaned the sabbath. But since it has been already shewn, that the end of the sabbath is to keep alive in the hearts of men a more deep sense of our duty to God, and of the obligations that religion puts us under, and not to load us with superstitious observances, or scrupulosities in smaller matters; it appears from thence, that only such an observation of the Lord's day is required, as tends to perfect and advance the service of God. We ought indeed to make the sabbath our delight; to rejoice on that day, to put from us the common concerns of life, *not speaking our own words, or doing our own ways*; that is, not letting our hearts run out into projects and cares relating to our own affairs, or wasting our time in unnecessary discourse; but to rejoice in the liberty to which Christ hath called us, who hath delivered us from this part of the Jewish bondage, and assured us, *that the sabbath was made for man*: and therefore a nice and scrupulous anxiety in small matters, savours more of the Jewish spirit, than the christian temper. But as we ought to be aware of this extreme, so we are much more in danger of another, I mean that of prophaning this day, either by minding our temporal concerns and affairs, or, which is yet much worse, by thinking we are on this day excused from our labours, that we may serve our lusts and pleasures with so much the more freedom. If the ceasing from labour is made an occasion to intemperance and disorder, to sloth and idleness, to vice and debauchery; this is plainly to turn the grace of God into lasciviousness. God did, in the Old Testament, reckon it among those blessings he had heaped on his people, that he *gave them his sabbaths to be a sign between him and them, that they might know that he was the Lord*; and as this, if well improved, is an excellent mean for setting forward the designs of religion; so, on the other hand, we walk contrary to God, and disobey his will, if we do not improve such blessings, by keeping holy the Lord's day, and not to profane it by servile work or sinful practices.

The proper ways of sanctifying this day, are first, the spending some considerable portions of time in our secret meditations, prayers, and studies; and we ought to review the past week, and observe how far we have been endeavouring to do our duty to God, and our neighbour; to examine wherein we have failed, what sins or errors we have been guilty of, what former vows and resolutions we have broken; into which of our former sins we have relapsed, or into what new ones we have fallen, and whom we have any way wronged in word or deed. All these things we ought to call to mind, that we may humbly confess them before God, be truly grieved for them, sincerely repent of and forsake them, and then to form holy and firm resolutions not again to fall into them. We ought also to observe what particular providences of God have occurred to us the past week, either such as tend to awaken and quicken us in our duty, or oblige us to offer up our prayers and thanksgivings to God. Those who are not well instructed in religion, should take pains to increase their knowledge, by reading or causing to be read to them, such portions of scripture, or other good books, as may give them some farther instruction, in order to the working out their *salvation, with fear and trembling*.

When a good man has been thus employing some part of the morning in fitting himself to appear before God, then he ought to go to the house of prayer, remembering that the scriptures join these two together, *Ye shall keep my sabbaths, and reverence my sanctuary*. We ought to consider the prayers and praises of the church, as the public services which we offer up to God, and in which we must remember, what a terrible condemnation they fall under, who *draw near to God with their mouth, and honour him with their lips, when their minds and hearts are far from him*. We should therefore join our hearts with our lips in every part of the worship. And when we pronounce the confession of sins, we must confess our secret ones to God; when the absolution is read, we ought most humbly to beg our share therein; when the psalms and hymns are repeated, we should raise up our souls, and rejoice in God, for the great blessings commemorated in them; while the lessons

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are reading, we ought to observe what particular instructions, reproof, or consolation arises to us, from any part of them; in the collects, and chiefly the litany, we should pour out our hearts to God, for the graces and blessings which we ask of him; in the thanksgiving we ought to join in an humble acknowledgment of those mercies, which we have particularly met with from God. When we make confession with our mouths of our faith, we must be sure to join with it the belief of our hearts; otherwise we lie to God, when we say we believe that to which our hearts do not consent. While the commandments are repeated, we ought to remember both our former sins, and the infirmities of our nature, together with the temptations to which we are exposed; so shall we have a true sense of our wants, both of *mercy and of grace to help in time of need.*

When we hear sermons, we ought particularly to observe, what parts of scripture are thereby rendered more intelligible to us, that so we may afterwards read these with more profit. We ought also to observe what sins are reprov'd in them, what duties are recommended, what resolutions of doubts, or directions are given, wherein we are more immediately concerned, that so we may lay them up in our hearts, and afterwards reflect upon them. We are not to hear sermons, as men who intend only to censure them, but as becomes those who are resolv'd to be the better for them; and when we get home we are to consider frequently in our thoughts, such passages in them, as are likely to have a good effect on us, *in order to our growing in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.* If these rules ought to be minded by us every Lord's day, much more should it be on days of communion; in which we are called to a more immediate commemoration of the death and sufferings of our Saviour, and to renew our vows to him: as then we again dedicate ourselves to him, and receive the fullest pledges of his love, we must awaken our minds to a greater seriousness, to more contrition for our sins, to more earnestness in our prayers, to greater firmness in our resolutions, to a higher fervour of charity, in our intercessions for others, to a fuller assurance of faith, and more elevated acts of praise and thanksgiving to God, for

all his mercies. But above all, for that astonishing effect of his love to mankind, in sending his son into the world to save sinners; in giving him to die for our sins, raising him again from the dead, and crowning him with glory and honour. Thus we ought to behave ourselves in the house of God, in all the several parts of the public worship, nor ought we to think it too hard a burthen to return a second time to evening prayer, and sermon; we should rather rejoice at our going often to the house of God together. For if we despise these solemn assemblies, we may thereby provoke God to visit us with a famine, not of *bread, or of water, but of hearing the word of the Lord.*

When the public worship is ended, every one of us ought for some time, to recollect his thoughts, and renew his vows and good resolutions; and remembering what we have learned, either from the word of God, or the sermon, to raise in our minds such a sense of things as is agreeable thereunto. Masters of families ought also to bring their families together to prayer, to the reading some portions of scripture, and of other good books; and we ought to edify and admonish one another, by singing of psalms, and serious godly discourses. It is also an act of charity, highly becoming this day, to *visit the sick, the widows, and the fatherless in their affliction*, to comfort the afflicted, to reconcile differences between neighbours, and to do such other acts of love and kindness, without disturbing too much our own devotion, as may tend to their good; by which peace, kindness, and love may be preserved among friends, neighbours, and acquaintance. For by so doing, we serve God, and advance the true ends, as well as the honour, of religion.

Thus I have shewn what are the particular duties of keeping the sabbath; by which we may perceive how generally God is dishonoured on this day; the due observation whereof, is one chief means, that God hath appointed to promote and increase religion in the world: and the neglect, or prophaning of it, is one great occasion of that forgetfulness of God, that immorality and impiety, which so much abounds. For if men on this day, do not regard their souls, and the concerns of religion, when they are at leisure, and not engaged about

about their ordinary affairs; how is it to be expected they should have much thoughts of religion, when their minds are distracted with their temporal concerns, and their bodies fatigued with labour? We ought then to think it one of the greatest blessings to a nation that God gives them his sabbaths; and those who despise this day and wish it was gone, as imagining it too great an interruption to their affairs, may provoke God to shut them out of his rest, even that rest, or *keeping of the sabbath, which remains for the people of God.*

Let us then consider well of how much importance our immortal souls are. For, *what shall it profit us if we gain the whole world, and lose our own souls?* Shall we labour all the week for our bodies, which are perishing, and yet think it too much to dedicate one day in seven to the care of our souls, that are to live for all eternity? Let us consider what a miserable thing it is to be ignorant of our duty in the midst of so much light and knowledge as we enjoy, and which may be easily acquired by any who will spend but a few hours once a week to learn instruction. If we will chuse a wilful ignorance, we may provoke God to give us up to that darkness in which some delight. But if we will hearken to his voice, and apply ourselves to the hearing and learning of his laws, he will make us to learn wisdom in the inward part: he will, by the assistance of his grace, *so open our eyes, that we may behold the wonders of his law; and so quicken our hearts, that we may run the ways of his commandments; he will guide us here with his counsel, and afterwards receive us to glory.*

S E R M O N XXXI.

By BISHOP HOPKINS.

The Fifth Commandment.

EXOD. xx. 12.

Honour thy father and thy mother, that thy days may be long in the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee.

As there is nothing wherein the truth and power of godliness, and the life of religion, is more concerned, than in a

conscientious performance of relative duties, because they daily occur; so there is no subject more ungrateful to men, than to be reminded of these duties, and re-proved for the neglect of them: however, the frequent occasion we have to practise them, renders it necessary to consider how to perform them.

I begin with the honour and reverence that is due from children to their parents. Reverence to parents consists in having a respectful love for, and an awful fear to offend them: not such a fear as terrifies, for that is a slavish and tormenting; but an obliging fear, that will create esteem and veneration; that will engage us to observe their commands, and refrain from whatever is displeasing to them. This reverence should be expressed in our words and actions. Our expressions must be full of respect and honour, giving them such titles as their quality and condition require; our words, in answering them, should be few, humble, and submissive. It is but reasonable we should give them the most obliging language, who first taught and instructed us to speak. We must also reverence them with a decent, modest, and respectful bodily behaviour, shewing all external signs of honour. Joseph, though highly exalted in the court of Pharaoh, when he brought his sons to receive the blessing of Jacob his father, bowed himself with his face to the earth. All four, morose, and unseemly looks towards a parent is threatened to be severely punished. *The eye that mocketh at his father, and despiseth to obey his mother, the ravens of the valley shall pick it out, and the young eagles shall eat it.*

But as we must honour them with reverence, so especially with obedience; without which all external respect is mere formality. *Children obey your parents in all things, for that is well-pleasing to God.* We are obliged to pay them both active and passive obedience. Active, in observing all their commands, that are not contrary to the laws of God; and passive, in suffering their anger and resentment, with all patience and submission, when they require to be performed what is sinful; rather than to disobey God. If they chasten and correct us for their own pleasure, yet we are to reverence them, to bear with their infirmities, to conceal and not expose their weakness to others. And if they are reduced to poverty,

erty, we are obliged liberally to assist them, according to our ability; it being a sin the most unnatural, for children that can relieve their necessitous parents, to suffer them, who were the cause and authors of their life, to want a livelihood and comfortable subsistence. We must also honour our parents, by regarding their good instructions, and imitating their pious examples. *My son, says Solomon, keep thy father's commandments, and forsake not the law of thy mother.* Until we are set free by their consent, we ought not to enter into the state of marriage, without their knowledge and approbation. If we seriously consider that we owe to our parents our lives, education, and many other benefits, we should never think any thing too much to do for them. Oh! the cares, anxious thoughts, and perplexing fears, which our parents have continually had for our welfare! And can we so return their love and tenderness, as to despise their persons, or become stubborn and disobedient? If we have any ingenuity in our nature, or that the principles of reason and equity are not quite extinguished in us, we should requite the love and solicitude which our parents have shewn us, in the most ample and acceptable manner that is possible. If any by disobedience have brought down the grey hairs of their parents with sorrow to the grave, let such seriously consider, what an unnatural sin they are guilty of: and since they cannot beg pardon of their parents, let them ask it of God, the great and universal Father of all; and beseech him, not to revenge their disobedience, by the undutifulness of their own children.

As to the duty of parents to their children, that respects either their temporal or spiritual good. The former consists in protecting and providing for their bodies; as the other does for their souls. This the law of nature requires. In brute beasts there is so strong a parental affection, as that they will expose their lives to the greatest hazard for the preservation and defence of their young. And if the instinct and impulse of nature is so powerful in irrational creatures, how much more should it prevail on us, who have reason given us on purpose to perfect nature? Their weakness and impotency demand from us our care and protection. To how many diseases and dangers are their feeble infancy exposed? and their growing child-

hood, through want of care and experience, daily leads them into many more. Parents therefore are to guard and defend them from every threatened injury: and if it is inhuman for parents to neglect the care of their children, much more wicked and diabolical is it to hurt or destroy them: yet this is the too common practice of many wretches, who, to conceal their shame, either abandon or murder their innocent babes. And as parents are to protect their children from incident evils, so are they to provide necessities and conveniencies for them, according to the station in which Providence hath placed them: even infidels and heathens are taught by the light and law of nature to make provision for their own. If we cannot leave them a sufficiency to subsist on, we should fix them to some business or employ, by which through God's blessing they may procure a livelihood. *Children are not to lay up for the parents, but parents for children.* And we ought to place them to such business, as is most agreeable to their genius and inclination; otherwise they will be uneasy all their days. The duty of parents to their children relating to spirituals, consists in taking care of their souls, and promoting their eternal happiness. Their first concern is to have them baptised, and admitted members of Christ's church; and whoever neglects this, is highly culpable, and acts very injuriously by their children. They are afterwards to instruct, admonish, and educate them in the knowledge and fear of God. Would parents bring them to the love of piety and virtue, whilst their minds are flexible, and before they are filled with vanity, the next generation would not be so debauched in their youth, nor obdurate in old age, as is every where now too visible and apparent. Such instructions should be done in an easy familiar way, by catechising and instructing them in the grounds and principles of the Christian religion.

A good example is another duty of parents. If we blaspheme the name of God, by swearing and cursing, abuse ourselves or others by riot and intemperance, how can we expect our children should revere that dreadful name we profane, and love that sobriety and temperance we recommend, but do not practise? What effect can words have, when we contradict them in our actions? If our children improve

in wickedness by our ill examples, what will our exhortations and admonitions avail, unless to reproach ourselves, and encrease our own condemnation? But if parents will with tenderness and affection instruct their children in the ways of virtue and religion, and confirm them in the practice thereof by their own good example, none would behave undutifully, or live wickedly, but such as are in their nature deplorably vicious. However, if neither instruction nor good example will prevail, then correction and discipline become a necessary duty; though to inflict it, may be as uneasy to the parent as the child. Reason and not passion should prescribe the measure of punishment. Immoderate correction does not amend and reform children, but either exasperates, and makes them more stubborn, or else dispirits and stupifies them. *Fathers should not provoke their children to anger, lest they be discouraged.* But where age and decency permit, the severity of discipline is sometimes necessary, if used with prudence. *He that spareth the rod, hateth his son; but he that loveth him, chastens him betimes.* Lastly, Parents are to offer up fervent and earnest prayers to God for their children, beseeching him to own and provide for them, to make them heirs of glory, and coheirs with Jesus Christ. That he would give them a convenient portion of temporal good things, whereby they may be enabled to serve him with greater cheerfulness; also to bestow on them spiritual blessings, and at last to bring them to eternal glory.

As for supreme magistrates, their duty is to establish the true worship and service of God, to reform all corruptions and abuses, to distribute justice impartially, to maintain the cause of the poor and oppressed, and restrain the insolence of proud oppressors. Governors ought to be exemplary for virtue and piety, because the eyes of their subjects are upon them. They ought to fear God above all, to seek his honour and glory, to be prudent in their designs, faithful in their promises, wise in their counsels, observant of the laws, careful of their subjects welfare, merciful to the poor, kind to the good, terrible to the evil, and just towards all; ever remembering they are men who must give an account unto God of the trust he hath reposed in them. The

duties of subjects towards princes and magistrates are honour, obedience, and prayer to God for them. We must honour and reverence them in our thoughts and words; speaking what good we know, and prudently concealing their vices and infirmities. To publish the faults of governors can only tend to alienate the affections, and relax the obedience of subjects. Much more wicked is it to falsely calumniate them by reviling whispers, or suspicious intimations, and to insinuate into the minds of the people sad fears and apprehensions of dangers; all which makes their subjects to despise, if not hate them. We ought to honour them, by contributing cheerfully out of our substance when the necessities of affairs require it. Obedience is another duty we owe them: we are commanded to be *subject to the higher powers, to submit to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake, whether it be to the king as supreme, or unto governors as sent by him, for the powers that be are ordained of God.* Fervent and earnest prayers for our governors is also a great duty of subjects. *Let supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving thanks be made for all men, especially for kings, and all in authority.* A crown is a heavy, though glittering ornament, and the welfare of thousands depends on the prudent counsels of a prince. The cares and burdens of government are weighty and constant; we ought therefore earnestly to pray that magistrates may be endued with sufficient abilities to discharge their high and important office, to God's glory and their subjects happiness.

The duties of husbands to their wives are to love, provide for, and instruct them; to act with tenderness, respect, and prudence towards them: love adorns all relations, and is the foundation of this. Though want of love will not dissolve the band of marriage, yet it destroys the comforts of a married state. A wife is the chiefest object of our love, even above parents, children, and friends. We must *leave father and mother for our wife. We must love our wives as ourselves,* be as careful and tender of their good as our own, and resent any injury done to them the same as if offered to us, they two being but one flesh. So that we are to love our wives with as much tenderness and natural affection as we do ourselves:

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XI. nay, husbands must love their wives as Christ did the church, which was better than he did his own life, for he shed his most precious blood for her. We are to love our wives as Christ loved his church, by bearing with and forgiving their weaknesses, by being willing to submit to many inconveniencies for their sakes, by interposing between them and any danger, and by promoting their spiritual good and benefit. A husband is to provide for his wife, to nourish and cherish her, to impart to her, according to his ability, what her occasions require. He ought not to spend in riot and excess among lewd and wicked companions, what should go towards her support and maintenance. *If a man provides not for his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel.* As the husband is the head of the wife, so is he the fountain of knowledge and wisdom, and therefore should instruct, advise, and direct her in all emergencies, especially in her duty to God. Indeed, where the wife is blessed with greater prudence and knowledge than the husband, he then ought to submit to her advice, though not to her authority; but this she must tender him with all modesty, respect, and submission. The husband is also to be tender and mild to his wife, and not to torment her by provoking words or actions. If the wife carefully perform her duty, she ought to be treated with love and kindness, to receive praise and commendation. Her failings should be rebuked with meekness, and so as to discover more of sorrow than anger. Perpetual quarrels embitter the comforts of life, and hinder each from performing their respective duties. Where contention between man and wife reigns, business is neglected, and ruin ensues; and nothing is regarded but how to quarrel and rail at one another. Respect and honour is due unto the wife, as being the weaker vessel; a husband is not to be observant to her humour, for that will dishonour him; nor is she to be a slave to him, for that would dishonour her; but she ought to be treated as a kind and dear companion. Lastly, A husband must manage his authority with prudence, not with rigour and violence: the best way to preserve his authority is, by discretion, sobriety, and an exemplary good life; this will produce a reverent esteem and veneration from the wife and family;

but a humourfome lightness or severity will expose men to the contempt of both. He that will not reverence himself, will not be revered by others; but where there is a mixture of prudence and purity, these will make a man truly awful, and induce the wife and family to esteem and imitate him.

The duties of wives to their husbands are subjection and obedience, respect and reverence. Wives are to *submit unto their husbands, as unto the Lord.* As the church is subject to Christ, so must wives be subject to their husbands in every thing. *The head of the woman is the man, for the woman is of the man. The man was not created for the woman, but the woman for the man.* Man was prior to the woman in the creation, and is therefore superior in nature. *A woman is not to usurp authority over the man, for Adam was first formed, and then Eve.* And the Apostle directs wives to be *discreet, chaste, keepers at home, good and obedient to their husbands.* Another duty is respect and reverence: *let the wife reverence her husband.* As he is her head and superior by God's appointment, she ought to reverence him with fear; not a servile and slavish, but an awful and loving fear. She should endeavour to frame her affections and outward behaviour agreeable to the inclinations of her husband; to rejoice when he is pleased, to be uneasy when he is offended. She ought to be helpful and assisting to him in all things; to his soul, by promoting religion and piety in him; to his body, by expressing due care and tenderness; to his good name, by defending his reputation from any injurious slanders; to his estate, by a prudent and frugal management of all his domestic concerns. She is not to dispose of any part of his estate contrary to his mind and consent; her proper office being to govern the family with industry, care, and fidelity. She is to be adorned with a meek and quiet spirit, with sobriety, modesty, and good works. Her countenance, gesture, and words should be such, as to express the inward calmness and serenity of her mind. Imperious, clamorous, and turbulent women are a torment to themselves and their husbands. There are also mutual duties to be performed by each; such as prayer, prudence in governing their families, discreet education of children, mutual love, and

and bearing with each other's infirmities.

The duties of servants to masters are obedience, reverential fear, diligence, honesty, and veracity. Their obedience is required in all things not contrary to the law of God: *servants obey in all things your masters according to the flesh.* Should the commands of masters be impertinent, imperious, or tyrannical, yet servants are no more exempted from obedience, than masters shall be from punishment, for requiring unreasonable things. Servants are also to suffer patiently the reproofs and corrections of their masters *without answering again, or murmuring.* A quiet silent submission is required, even when the servant hath given no just cause for being rebuked, but that it proceeds from the unprovoked rage and passion of a master. The Apostle's command is, *servants be subject to your own masters with all fear, not only to the good and gentle, but also to the froward; if a man for conscience towards God suffers wrongfully, and takes it patiently, this is praise-worthy, and acceptable to God. But if, when we are buffeted for our faults we take it patiently, what room for glory in this?* Indeed of all things belonging to the duty of a servant, this is the most difficult, and nothing can sweeten and make it tolerable but a sense of duty, and the expectation of a reward from God. Reverential fear of masters is another duty of servants, who are commanded *to be subject to their masters with all fear.* This fear is to be expressed in their words and actions: in their words, by forbearing all irreverent muttering, and indecent expressions; by giving such respectful titles as their place and station require; by speaking well of them, if they can with truth; or otherwise to be silent, and conceal their infirmities: in their actions, by a modest and respectful behaviour, by observing their commands, and doing what they think will be pleasing and acceptable to them. Diligence is another duty: he is not a faithful servant who is slothful and negligent, for if he doth not use his strength and time in his master's service, he is a thief, and robs him of so much advantage. Servants are also to be just, faithful, and honest, not to defraud their masters of the least thing, but to serve them with fidelity and integrity. Many have been reduced and ruined by the

unfaithfulness and carelessness of servants, either stealing from them, or prodigally wasting their properties. Truth and veracity is another duty: lying is a sin very odious to God, and most detestable to men. Servants are as the hands and eyes of masters, and ought to report nothing but what is true. Lying is the effect of cowardice, of a base slavish fear. Lastly, Servants are to serve their masters with good-will and singleness of heart; not as men-pleasers, only with eye-service, who are no longer diligent than their masters are present; but as servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart. Servants are to have respect not so much unto men as unto God; and to serve well, because God hath commanded it. Let their service be never so mean, painful, and laborious, yet if they perform it out of conscience to God's command, he esteems it as done to himself, and will hereafter bountifully reward them. And this is a great encouragement for servants to persevere in well-doing.

As to masters, their first duty is a prudent care in the choice of servants. This is a concern of great moment, on which the comfort and happiness, or the trouble and misery of a family doth much depend. The qualifications of a servant are, ability to discharge the duties of his place, an upright conscience, and piety towards God: the last is of great importance though too little regarded; for few inquire about their servants principles in religion, but chuse them as we do beasts of burden, the most strong and able. But this is very imprudent and sinful. Masters should never think servants fit for their service, unless they are careful to worship that God whom both are bound to serve and obey. Wicked servants will corrupt a whole family; their lewd examples will soon tempt others to be as bad as themselves. To this may be imputed that general profaneness so prevalent in most families, especially where there are numerous servants. Children by conversing with such, here imbibe the first rudiments of vice; learn the first syllables of oaths, curses, and obscenity; and who, for their easy docility and ready aptness therein, are applauded by these impious wretches. Such servants are the pests of mankind, as they corrupt those in their youth, who may afterwards

afterwards have an influence on the state and commonwealth, and thereby render them a shame to their families, and a curse to the kingdom. For where servants are wicked, children are more influenced by their flattery and examples, than the authority and command of parents. It is therefore the wisdom and concern of masters to chuse such servants as know their duty, and make conscience of performing it, in whose integrity and fidelity they may repose themselves in safety. Another duty of masters is, to govern their servants with prudence, and to make a reasonable provision for them. A master's demeanor should be grave and awful, and his very countenance beget reverence. If a master's behaviour is mean and indiscreet, servants will grow familiar and contemptuous, not that masters are to command with rigour or to give ill and reviling language, for that will discourage servants, and make them hate their place; but there should be such a mixture of mildness with gravity, of love with authority, as that the servants should be both compelled and inclined to obedience. Power may force submission, but only reason and gravity can render masters venerable. The commands of masters should be lawful, for servants have a supreme lord and master in heaven whom they must fear and obey. A servant is obliged to work, but not to lye, steal, or cheat for a master; they must *obey God rather than men*. As to correction, prudence must be the measure of what is fit, according to their age, temper, and the nature of the offence. It should be inflicted for reformation and amendment, and not out of passion and revenge: reproof is generally the best discipline.

Another duty of a master is, to provide for the bodies and souls of servants. He is obliged to supply them with all things necessary. *Masters are to give unto their servants what is just and equal*. To detain from them the reward of their labour as covenanted or agreed for, is a crying and provoking sin. The care of their souls is also the master's concern. For he is priest and prophet in his own house, as well as lord and king. He is to instruct his family in religion, to inform their ignorance, excite them to serve God, to pray with and for them, to direct them in the way to heaven, and,

above all, to set before them a holy, pious example. Masters should remember, that as their servants have immortal souls, so God hath entrusted the care thereof to them. Masters should instruct the ignorant, reduce the erroneous, rebuke the disobedient, discard the incorrigible and audacious, and more especially require their servants religiously to observe the Lord's day, in the due observance of which a great part of the life of religion consists.—Thus have I considered the mutual duties of these several relations; and it is necessary to observe, as a general rule, that if one party omits to discharge his duty, this is no excuse for the other. Should a father be careless and cruel, yet the child's duty still remains; should a master be tyrannical and severe, yet a servant is to reverence, fear, and obey him; and so of other relations.

To the precept in this commandment, *honour thy father and mother*, is added as a motive and encouragement, the promise of long life. Indeed this promise was made to the Jews, and concerned the land of Canaan, which was a type of our enjoying the felicity of heaven as a reward for our observing the laws of God. For as the Apostle says, *godliness is profitable unto all things, having the promises of this life, and that which is to come*. He that *desires to live, and loveth many days, let him depart from evil and do good*. But in all promises of temporal blessings a condition is implied, that they shall only be fulfilled, if they promote our eternal happiness; and therefore God doth often in mercy abridge this promise by taking us from the world, lest it should take us from him.

S E R M O N XXXII.

By Dr. L U P T O N.

The Sixth Commandment.

Exod. xx. 13.

Thou shalt not kill.

THE natural impressions and obligations of moral duty, which immediately relate to the preservation of human life, are

are such strong guards to secure it, that nothing surely but a very powerful temptation can ever break through them. Other sins more easily prevail over us, because they are agreeable and pleasing to our corrupt inclinations; but, corrupted as our nature is, there is something so shocking in the sin of murder, that a man must offer the utmost violence to his own natural disposition before he can prevail with himself to destroy his own or his neighbour's life. And lest any thing should be wanting to render these strong bonds of duty still more inviolable, God hath been pleased to confirm and enforce the voice of nature by this express revealed law, *Thou shalt not kill*. In discoursing on these words, it will be necessary to adjust the latitude and extent of the commandment, and then to represent the guilt and danger which men incur by transgressing it.

As there are some instances of murder which are not universally allowed to be such, but are often palliated under various pretences and false colours of vindication; so there are some cases wherein one may violently take away the life of another without violating this command. The lawfulness of this, in the case of self-preservation, is so certain and obvious, that it can scarce admit of any mistake, so long as this necessary caution is observed, that a man should not on every little suspicion or appearance of danger presently invade his neighbour's life, though he may innocently do it; but only when the danger is so manifest that he must unavoidably either give or receive the fatal stroke. The lawfulness of war, on some occasions and under certain restrictions, is also plainly warranted by the authority of holy scripture, as well as by the nature and reason of things, the situation and circumstances of human affairs; it being often impossible for states and kingdoms to support their just rights, or even preserve themselves or their allies from utter ruin, by any other means than war. Magistrates are likewise invested with a just authority to inflict capital punishments on offenders, by cutting off the corrupted members of the body politic, for the preservation and benefit of the whole society. The innocence of that person also is abundantly clear, who, through ignorance or unavoidable accidents, deprives another of life. For an action

which has no foundation in the will and intention of the agent, is not properly a moral action, and consequently cannot be criminal. And therefore under the Mosaic dispensation there was a sanctuary provided by divine appointment for every one who was so innocently unfortunate as to kill his neighbour ignorantly and at unawares, lest the avenger of blood should pursue and slay him before his innocence could be sufficiently cleared. So that whoever knowingly and designedly, (but not ignorantly or accidentally,) without any necessity, arising from any imminent and unavoidable danger of his own destruction, does take away or invade his neighbour's life, is guilty of the sin forbidden in this commandment. And this imputation of murder properly falls on them who thus deprive their neighbour of life, either by open assault and violence, by stratagem and secret contrivance, by shedding his blood themselves, or engaging others to embroil their hands in the murder; either by acting as principals or accessaries, by command or persuasion, by threatening or encouragement, by direct concert and consultation, or by suggestion; either by bearing false witness against him themselves, or by suborning others; or by any instruments, means, or methods, which are not allowed by divine authority.

And from hence it likewise follows, that every person who knowingly and wilfully destroys his own life, is guilty of murder. For he has no authority to become the instrument or cause of his own death. We are not the proprietors of our lives, and therefore may not dispose of them at pleasure. God who gave them hath the only right to take them away; so that whoever offers violence to his own life, manifestly invades the prerogative, and usurps the right and authority of God. Duels also are direct violations of this commandment; being to be ranked in the number of those violent attempts on human life, which are not allowed by divine authority; and therefore the guilt of murder is chargeable on those who engage in them. The liberty allowed to a private man of destroying his neighbour's life, is both by natural and revealed law solely confined to the case of self-preservation; but that plea is utterly foreign to the condition and circumstances of him who formally

gives

gives or accepts a challenge. And he adds to sin of making an unnecessary attempt on his neighbour's life, by needless throwing himself into the utmost danger of losing his own. Nor can mutual consent and permission excuse or be any just vindication of such men as thus expose their lives; because God being the sole proprietor, the absolute lord of every man's life, no one has any right to dispose of or determine the duration of it, nor to transfer the disposal of it to another. Lastly, This commandment extends not only to our actions, but to our words, to the secret intentions and affections of our hearts. Our blessed Saviour expressly applies it to the several degrees, and various effects of causeless anger, breaking forth into bitter, reproachful language; and the Apostle tells us, that hatred is murder, and inconsistent with the hopes of heaven. *Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer; and ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him.* Having thus considered the latitude and extent of the commandment, I proceed

To represent the guilt and danger which men incur by transgressing it. If the measure of this transgression is taken, either from the indignity thereby offered unto God, or from the injury done to man, from the punishments expressly denounced against it, or from the anguish and horror which it is apt to leave on the mind, we shall find abundant reason to assign it a place amongst the most heinous crying sins. The first instance of murder in the world was closely followed with perplexity, oppression of spirit, and intolerable despair. *My punishment (said Cain, the abandoned fugitive) is greater than I can bear; or rather, my iniquity is greater than can be forgiven. Every one that findeth me shall slay me.* It was a dismal, but natural apprehension, which his guilt suggested to his thoughts, that the whole creation must be alarmed on the occasion, and stand ready to execute vengeance on him. And that weight of confusion, which natural conscience lays on such sinners, must be vastly increased by the severe expressions of God's indignation against them. *The Lord abhors the blood-thirsty.* Atonements and means of satisfaction were by divine institution provided for the sins of the people in several other instances of a very high and provoking

nature; but God hath expressly forbid shewing mercy and compassion to a murderer, or taking any satisfaction for his life. *If any man hate his neighbour, and smite him mortally that he die, thine eye shall not pity him. Ye shall take no satisfaction for the life of a murderer, but he shall surely be put to death.* Not the cities of refuge, nor the holy altar of God, (a sanctuary the most sacred and inviolable,) could exempt such an unpardonable offender from punishment; *if a man come presumptuously upon his neighbour to slay him with guile, thou shalt take him from mine altar that he may die.* And when the irreversible sentence of death is pronounced on him, the reason given is, that in the image of God made he man. Contempt of God is the great aggravation of sin, which in this of murder is aggravated to a singular height. Not satisfied with defying his laws, and assuming his dominion, they insult his very being, by defacing and destroying the only image of himself, which he hath impressed on the visible world. The injury done to man, is also very notorious; for other injuries may be repaired, or admit of some compensation, but this is utterly irreparable. Other injuries may rob a man of his estate, reputation, or some particular advantages; but this summary of mischief deprives him all at once of every temporal benefit and satisfaction: nay, it may prove fatal to the sufferer's soul, as well as body, and at once involve him in the first and second death, by depriving him of that space to repent, which might have been necessary to his eternal salvation. Or should the injury not follow the sufferer in a future state, and press him down into everlasting destruction, as not happening to him when in an impenitent state; yet it must be an heavy weight to him, even in respect to his view of that eternity into which he is so suddenly sent.

For who can bear the thoughts of being hastily dispatched into the other world? Who is not exceedingly desirous of going down to the grave in peace and quiet? Even the best of men would be glad of a few leisure minutes at the last, deliberately to review and lament their past defects and miscarriages; would be glad of a little calm and undisturbed space of time, in the conclusion of their lives, to adorn their souls, and prepare

them for their immediate appearance before the glorious and unspotted presence of God. How dreadful then must that injury be, which deprives men of circumstances so advantageous and desirable? Such is the guilt and danger attending the transgressing of this commandment, in the first instance of it, as signifying wilful murder, or offering unlawful violence to our neighbour's life.

I shall next consider the reasons of the guilt and danger of those persons who destroy their own lives. That they are transgressing against this commandment has been already proved; it will therefore be needless to shew, that they are involved in the guilt, and obnoxious to the punishment of murder in general; but they expose themselves in a particular manner to the greater condemnation, by some singular sentiments and dispositions, which are commonly the foundation of this unnatural crime. For instance, if men destroy themselves, to avoid present sufferings, do they not tacitly declare, that God shall not act by them as he pleaseth; that they will resolutely break through what he hath determined and established; that they will not be confined to such circumstances as he hath allotted them; but will wrest their lives out of his hands, and not suffer him to prolong them beyond the limits of their own pleasure? And if this is the secret language of their hearts, what can be expected, but that God should execute the severity of his wrath upon them? Or if pride, envy, and ambition do so govern their minds, as that in the abundance of their arrogance and resentment they will violently remove themselves out of the world, perhaps because they are not advanced to a more advantageous situation in it; what can they reasonably expect or imagine, but to feel the weight of Solomon's observation, *Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall*? a fall into eternal as well as temporal destruction. For what foundation can there be of hope that God will forgive a flagrant sin, without the sinner repenteth? and how can a man truly repent of a sin, in the very commission of which he dies? There are some other sins besides that of offering direct violence to a man's life, which have been usually esteemed branches of self-murder; as intemperance, or the indulgence of any

other vice, which impairs the health and destroys the life.

As to the guilt and danger of engaging in duels, these being manifest instances of wilful murder, such persons expose themselves to the severities of God's indignation denounced against it. Those who die in such engagements go into the other world, not only void of charity, which is absolutely necessary to their future happiness, but glowing hot with wrath and fury. And when such passions have the last possession of their souls, what society of spirits can they be qualified for to live with to all eternity? Or should they not immediately perish in the conflict, yet is their guilt the same in the sight of God, the searcher of hearts, who judges of men's wicked attempts, not by the success or event of them, but by the designs and intentions from which they proceed. And dare a man hazard eternal and unspeakable misery, for the sake of resenting an affront, or redressing an injury, how great soever? Is it a rational conduct, only to avoid a groundless imputation of cowardice, for a man to run such hazard to testify his false courage, by insulting the Lord of heaven and earth, and spending the last efforts of his strength and life in an act of defiance and rebellion against him that gave them? For supposing duels the only possible means of redressing some kinds of injury, it would not from thence follow, that recourse should be had thereto, by those who call themselves christians, and acknowledge the divine authority of the holy scriptures, which enjoin us not to *avenge ourselves, but rather give place unto wrath; for, saith the Lord, vengeance is mine*. If the world hath advanced some mistaken notions, in direct opposition to God and the gospel, can those who espouse and are influenced by them be properly numbered amongst the servants of Christ? Every man who professeth the gospel is obliged to an inviolable exercise of patience, meekness, and forbearance, under the various circumstances and occurrences of life, in imitation of our Lord and Saviour. How inconsistent then is it, for a christian to be governed by such false notions of honour, as are directly contrary to the fundamental rules of his duty?

Whoever faithfully and constantly adheres to virtue and the positive commands of God, despising every imputation and reflection

reflection levelled against him, gives a much stronger evidence of true greatness and generosity of mind, than those who relinquish their duty to avoid that uneasiness which such treatment occasions. Every great mind will make favourable allowances for little infirmities and heats of passion, which are the unhappiness of human nature, and too apt to arise amongst dearest friends; nor is he less inclined to make all lawful satisfaction for any injury he hath inadvertently offered his neighbour. To fear men more than God is the most dishonourable misapplication and degeneracy of fear. To be deterred from obedience by the uneasy apprehension of being censured for the faithful discharge of it; or to be laughed and frightened out of our duty, are certain indications of a weak, little, and base spirit, which for want of ability to support itself, readily gives up the most excellent ornaments and accomplishments, when any attempt is made on them. Those therefore who engage in duels, from fear of suffering some seeming calumnies and reproaches, do at once forfeit all just pretensions to true honour and generosity of mind, all claim and title to eternal salvation.

Lastly, We must take diligent heed not to transgress this commandment, by the intentions and affections of our heart, though no actual violence is committed. Those who have not sufficient degrees of natural courage, or want favourable opportunities actually to defile their hands with blood, may yet sacrifice their neighbour in their secret thoughts and wishes, and indulge their imagination in the view of those mortal wounds they dare not give; and men, who are afraid to handle the instruments of death, may shoot out their arrows, even bitter words, and pierce the souls of their brethren, with the expressions of cruelty, malice, and contempt. But the christian law is, that *whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause, shall be in danger of the judgment; and whosoever shall say to his brother, Racha, shall be in danger of the council; but whosoever shall say, thou fool, shall be in danger of*

hell-fire. And this demonstrates the excellence of the gospel of Christ, that as moral duty is therein raised to the most elevated height of perfection, so more especially does it recommend and promote the exercise of universal charity and benevolence, by an absolute prohibition of all strife, variance, clamour, evil speaking, wrath, hatred, envy, and malice; for these every disciple of Christ has solemnly renounced, and whoever indulges them dishonours the profession, and forfeits the gospel privileges.

Let then the use and application of this discourse be, that the heinousness of the sin of murder should raise in us a proportionable abhorrence of it, and the utmost esteem and desire of those qualities and practices which are most directly opposite thereto; that we should not only have the tenderest regard to the preservation of our neighbour's life, but to the comforts and conveniences of it; that instead of violence and injury, we should abound in acts of beneficence; that anger should be prevented by habitual meekness; malice by loving-kindness and compassion; revenge by constant endearments; and hatred by complacency and delight. So shall we fully answer the end of the commandment; and being thus heavenly in our dispositions here, we cannot fail of obtaining an inheritance in those mansions of everlasting peace, love, and joy, where our Saviour is gone to prepare a place for us.

Let the consideration of what has been said possess our minds with the greatest horror and abomination of this sin of murder; and make us extremely watchful of ourselves, that we never fall into it, but keep at the farthest distance, and tremble at the least approaches towards any degree or instance of it. Let us pray for and endeavour to obtain an humble, meek, and charitable temper; more especially, for the continual assistance of God's grace, which can alone prevent, preserve, and restrain us from this, or any other the most enormous transgression. Which God of his infinite mercy grant, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

SERMON XXXIII.

By BISHOP BURNET.

The seventh Commandment.

Exod. xx. 14.

Thou shalt not commit adultery.

As this was one of the ten commandments spoken by God himself, so the punishment of it under the Jewish law, was likewise appointed by God; and the man that committeth adultery with his neighbour's wife, the adulterer and the adulteress shall be put to death. But though in the New Testament there are no laws of this nature, against this or any other sin, yet there are much more terrible denunciations made of the judgments of God against it: for, as the author of our blessed religion was, in his own person, holy, harmless, and undefiled, so he has most strictly charged us to be pure and holy in all manner of conversation, as he who called us was holy; without which we are assured, we shall not see the Lord; and the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness.

One part of the judgment of God against those who live not answerably to their holy profession is, that God gives them up to uncleanness, and to vile affections; and so odious were all the sins of the flesh to the holy apostles, that they charged the first christians not to keep company with any man that was called a brother, that is, a christian, if he was a fornicator, a covetous man, an idolater, a railer, a drunkard, or an extortioner, and with such an one no not to eat. St. Paul also warns us not to deceive ourselves; for neither fornicators, adulterers, thieves, covetous men, drunkards, revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God. And reckoning up the works of the flesh, he begins at adultery, fornication, and uncleanness; and concludes, that they who do such things, shall not inherit the kingdom of God; and that therefore, they that are Christ's, that is, true christians, have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts." The same apostle does also most earnestly charge the Ephesians in these words; but fornication, and all uncleanness, or covetousness, let it not be once named amongst you, as becomes saints. And to avoid all approaches to it, he charges them to ab-

stain from filthiness, foolish talking and jesting, which are not convenient. By which is meant all steps towards impurity, lewd jests, and indecent discourses; to which he adds, for this you know, that no whoremonger, nor unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ, or of God. And because there were in those days, as well as in this corrupted age, some who made light of this sin, and perhaps scoffed at the judgments of God, which were declared against it; he says of these, let no man deceive you with vain words, for because of these things comes the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience; be not ye therefore partakers with them. The same things are repeated by him in his Epistle to the Colossians; and in his Second Epistle to the Thessalonians he tells them, that as it was the will of God, that they should abstain from fornication, so it was also the great means of preserving themselves pure, even their sanctification; and that, though the worship of idolaters was commonly defiled with great licentiousness, and many disorders of this sort, yet God had called Christians not to uncleanness, but to holiness. And in the visions of St. John, whoremongers are in two different places reckoned among those that are shut out of the New Jerusalem, and who shall have their part in the lake that burneth with fire and brimstone, which is the second death.

Nor did our Saviour only condemn acts of uncleanness, but he being the author of a religion designed for the cleansing of our hearts, has carried the precept further in these words; ye have heard that it hath been said by them of old time, thou shalt not commit adultery; but I say unto you, that whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her, hath committed adultery with her already in his heart. In this he strikes at the root of sin, which is in the heart; for when lust is once conceived there, it bringeth forth sin; and of this sin it may more particularly be said, that when it is finished it bringeth forth death. For Solomon, whose heart was corrupted by those impure desires, tells us, from sad experience, that he who is enticed by a harlot, goeth after her as an ox to the slaughter, as a fool to the correction of the stocks; till a dart strike through his liver, and as a bird hasteth to the snare, and knows not that it is for his life; and he concludes, her house is the way to hell, going down

down to the chambers of death. Now, though there may seem to be an extreme severity in our Saviour's charging impure looks and desires with the sin of adultery; yet this, instead of making the yoke of the commandment heavier, makes it really lighter; it being much harder for us to maintain our purity, if we let our eyes and desires wander after forbidden objects, than it will be to stop the first motions to sin; and with holy Job, to *make a covenant with our eyes*, and upon that to say, *why then should I think upon a maid?* St. Paul also useth this argument to persuade us to purity, that *the body is made not for fornication, but for the Lord*; that we are all one body in Christ, and therefore, that our bodies are the members of Christ; that by this sin, those bodies that are sanctified, come to be defiled, and that *our body is the temple of the Holy Ghost, which is in us*: and elsewhere he says, *that if any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy, for the temple of God is holy, which temple we are.* Now if it would give us horror to see the house of God defiled, by putting unclean beasts in it; or which is worse, if we saw the churches prostituted by making them public places of lewdness and vice, we ought, according to St. Paul's reasoning, to esteem it a much more heinous thing, if these living temples of God should be thus prophaned.

From hence we see, that if we believe the holy scriptures, and take the New Testament to be the rule of our life, nothing can be more clear and express, than that these sins are so odious to God, that no man who lives in them, can have any part or portion in the mercies of God, but that he is of the number of those workers of iniquity that are to be cast out *into outer darkness, where there is weeping, wailing, and gnashing of teeth for ever.* These laws are set us by a holy God, who is of *purser eyes than to behold iniquity*, for only the pure in heart and life shall see him. Nor can the spotless Lamb of God suffer any to follow him, who with the swine love to wallow in this defilement. If we think these precepts hard, and these threatenings terrible, this is only for want of due consideration. We must then govern ourselves according to the doctrine of Christ, or renounce our christianity, if we would rather gratify our impure appetites and desires, than keep our bodies thus pure

and holy; there is no reconciling this to our holy faith, we cannot be both the members of Christ, and the members of a harlot. We must not therefore flatter ourselves with false notions, as if these were only dreadful words given out to fright us; they are true, or all christianity is only a cunningly-devised fable. For there are no parts of the whole New Testament more plain and express, and less liable to any doubtful meaning, than these which have been now delivered; and therefore, if we believe that God has revealed his gospel, as the only means by which we can fly from the wrath which is to come, when Jesus Christ shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels in flaming fire, taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, who shall be punished with everlasting destruction, from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his power; then we must be very diligent and sedulous to obey these precepts, that *so cleansing ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, we may perfect holiness in the fear of God, and glorify him in our bodies and in our spirits, which are God's.*

And besides all that hath been said of the wrath and judgments of God against these sins, if we will but consider the state and order of this world, and our temporal and eternal interest, we shall see many other reasons concurring to enforce the observance of these commandments, and obliging us to acknowledge, that they are holy, just, and good. As for married persons, they have mutually given their faith to one another, by a solemn vow and oath made in the presence of God; so that in this sin both perjury and impurity meet together in the same action. The married man that lets his heart wander after other objects, neglects his own house, loaths his wife, and hates his children. Consider, you husbands, what you do, in the words of Solomon, *lest you give your honour unto others, and your years unto the cruel: lest strangers be filled with your wealth, and your labours be in the house of a stranger; and you mourn at last, when your flesh and your body are consumed.* When you have nothing left but poverty and shame, rottenness, or loathsome painful diseases, together with a guilty conscience; more exhausted with the horrors of a vicious life, than the body that is perhaps disfigured, or,

at least, violently tormented with the remnants of those loose and unruly appetites. Follow therefore the advice of the wise man, *Drink waters of thy own cistern, and running waters out of thine own well*, (a figure of speech importing a man's living happily with his own wife,) *let them be only thine own and not strangers with thee; let thy fountain be blessed, and rejoice with the wife of thy youth, and be thou ravished always with her love. And why wilt thou, my soul, be ravished with a woman? For the ways of man are before the Lord, and he pondereth all his goings.* Let us not flatter ourselves with this, that our sins are secret, and no eyes see them; nor yet wait for the twilight, and because we have disguised our face say, no eye shall see me; but we should remember, that God *compasses our paths, and is acquainted with all our ways, and besets us before and behind*: and though we may foolishly say, *surely the darkness shall cover me, yet even the night shall be light about us; yea the darkness hideth not from him, but the night shineth as the day; the darkness and the light are both alike to him.* Alas! all these stolen pleasures that are now so sweet, when our iniquities shall compass us about, and make us possess many wearisome days and nights; when, between a wasting body and a guilty mind, a ruined fortune and a broken family, we feel the arrows of the Almighty piercing us, and the poison of them drinking up our spirits; when our sins have left us nothing in the decays of nature, but shame and infection, tribulation and anguish; then, even when perhaps it is too late, we shall think of crying unto God, and repenting of our sins, after they have left us and not we them; and forsaking them only, as not being able to live any longer in them.

O foolish people and unwise! Why will you not in time consider what shall be the end of all these things? Ye adulteresses, that, against the decencies of your nature, and that modesty which is the peculiar ornament of your sex, forget the vows of marriage, and your covenant with God; consider what you lose when you cast off your innocence, and make yourselves the reproach of your husbands, to whom you should be a crown; how you draw infamy on your children, by intermixing a spurious and uncertain brood; how you rob your husbands of their honour, your chil-

dren of their fame, and yourselves of your reputation and credit; how you dissolve the tie of marriage, and the affection of a married state; how by an indecent and unchaste deportment, you raise terrible disquiets and uneasiness in the minds of your husbands, *for jealousy is the rage of a man.* It provokes a revenge that often cannot be appeased but with blood, either that of the injured husband, or the object of his jealousy; and the guilt of such blood lies chiefly on the woman, whose unchaste deportment has kindled the furious passion. Your sin is often robbery, as well as adultery and perjury, when the child of one man inherits the estate of the other on whom he is imposed, and who carries away either the whole, or at least his share in an inheritance, that of right belongs to others.

Consider this, all ye that defile the marriage bed, and think to face it out before the world, either with the hypocritical shews of piety, or with a loud and clamorous boldness. Remember you have to do with God, *who will bring to light the hidden things of darkness*, and who will perhaps raise such horrors in your souls, that you will not be able to bear your own burthen, but become a terror to yourselves, as well as a reproach to all that belong to you. As for those who have, perhaps, some apprehension of the guilt of defiling the marriage bed, and therefore, that they may have less remorse for the free range of pleasure, in which they intend to live, will not enter into a married state, but deny themselves in no appetite, and so live loose and ungoverned lives; let such persons, *who walk in the ways of their heart, and in the sight of their eyes, remember, that for all these things God will bring them into judgment.* Consider that these pleasures of sin, that are but for a season, will waste your strength; expose your life and health to many dangers, and above all corrupt your minds; they will entice you to be the instruments of tempting others to sin, by bringing a double guilt upon you, both your own and the persons whom you delude. Remember you will be the instrument of giving being to an illegitimate issue, who are born to inherit shame and contempt, poverty and misery; you refuse to follow the method that God has appointed for the increase of mankind, but chuse that which your brutish appetite suggests.

suggest. You who follow forbidden pleasures, run yourselves into such a shameful course of life, as to be often tempted to deny and disown it, even with oaths and bitter imprecations. There is a fatal connections of sins one with another; ill actions commonly give suspicions, from whence often arise challenges and accusations, and these cannot be thrown off but by bold denials and impudent falsehoods, which are too frequently confirmed by bloody oaths. Injustice of all sorts also proceeds from this ill course of life; persons who promise themselves to one another are often false therein, and so carry a curse with them into any marriage which they may afterwards contract. In short, these men walk after their flesh, and not after the spirit; they prefer their own inordinate affections to the laws of God, and the precepts of the gospel. For St. Paul hath expressly said, *that to avoid fornication, every man ought to have his own wife, and every woman her own husband; and if any cannot contain, let them marry; for it is better to marry than burn. Therefore, I beseech you, as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against your souls; remember that you are redeemed from your vain conversation; be ye therefore as obedient children, not fashioning yourselves according to your former lusts. Remember that whoredom and wine take away the heart; and that, by the means of a whorish woman a man is brought to a morsel of bread; therefore keep you from the evil woman, and from the flattery of the tongue of a strange woman. Lust not after her beauty in thy heart, neither let her take thee with her eye-lids; for the woman whose heart is snares and nets, and whose hands are brands, is more bitter than death. Whoso pleaseth God shall escape from her; but the sinner shall be taken by her; and he that is abhorred of the Lord, shall fall into this pit.*

Lay these things to heart seriously, and in time, before you have purchased the knowledge of them at too dear a rate. Consider further, that if such advices were given by Solomon, under the old dispensation, in which, by reason of the infirmity of the Jewish nation, and for the hardness of their hearts, many things were dispensed with to them; certainly they are much more binding to us christians, who are called to so high a degree of purity. Therefore, it is not enough for us to be blameless

and harmless, and without rebuke, but we are commanded to walk *as the sons of God, and to shine as lights in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation. It is the peculiar character of christianity, that it obliges us to mortify our bodies, to crucify the flesh, to put off the old man with his deeds, and to put on the new man; so that the same mind may be in us that was in Christ Jesus. We must abstain even from all appearances of evil; which is set forth in this noble figure, hating even the garment that is spotted by the flesh; that is, our abhorring every approach to any degree of defilement.*

If you think these things are difficult, and not easy for flesh and blood, that is not to be denied; but if you follow the methods recommended in the scriptures, you will find the difficulty to grow daily much less. Nor, indeed, ought you to think it hard, if you are required to be at some pains for the saving of your souls. You are willing to put yourselves to trouble for every thing else; the learning of a trade, the following of husbandry, the life of a soldier, are all things of great difficulty, and that yield but a small reward; yet men submit themselves to much toil and drudgery in every one of these. Most men's diversions and pleasures put them to a good share of trouble; and is it to be imagined, that so great a thing as eternal life, should be obtained without any difficulty or labour? Yet, after all, the labour is not so great, but it may be overcome. If men will by rioting and drunkenness, by sloth and idleness, and by exposing themselves to such temptations as they may easily avoid and resist in the beginning, if they are a little watchful; I say, if they will by such methods be laying in provision for the flesh, and for its lusts and affections, then it is no wonder if their appetites, thus indulged, should be high and unruly. But if they will learn to be sober and temperate, and study by fasting often to subdue the body; if they will avoid all that company and those occasions that betray them into these sins; keeping themselves free from the first steps, in which the appetite is yet but weak and feeble, and will follow the works of their calling with care and application, so as to employ their thoughts and time in them; and if they will make choice of such diversions, as do not betray them into these temptations; they will then find it very

easy to resist or avoid them. The heathens understood this, and even one of the lewdest of their poets tells us, that the strength and arts of lusts perish, if men take care to be well employed and are not idle.

In the next place, you ought to follow the rule of religion, and to take a help-mate with whom you may hope to live happily together. Where the husband and wife are united to each other with the bonds of virtue and religion, and love one another in the Lord; as this is a kind of heaven upon earth, so it secures their hearts from impure and wandering desires, as long as they so continue and remain. In order to this end, you ought to be very careful in the choice you make in marrying yourselves, or your children; that you may not sacrifice both the peace and purity of your lives to those base considerations, upon which many of those, who even pass for wise persons in the esteem of the world, chuse a consort, and sell themselves or their children for a little money, or some other secular ends. But those who would marry in the Lord, that is, as becomes christians, ought to make such a choice, that in the company of the person with whom they are to lead their lives, they may hope to serve God, and to save their own souls; therefore the virtue and piety of the person ought to be the first and chief thing minded; not but that other considerations ought also to have a part and share therein; but when regard is only had to wealth, or other carnal ends, then the marriage will be soon repented of, the bed loathed, nothing but brawlings and contention, and at last a dissolution of that sacred faith.

To the sins of our fathers, this age has added the open giving up of marriages, and the parties allowing themselves that, which no religion nor law can allow them, to live impudently in a consortship with other persons, as if they were married to them; which is a degree of wickedness, that we have added to the former measure of our sins, and which without this, was measure heaped up and running over. God grant it may not be the filling up the measure of our fathers; and that God who has threatened, *that he will be a swift witness against the adulterers, and the false swearers*, do not for the sake of those breakers of wedlock, who become guilty of both these sins at once, arise against

this nation to judgment because of those crimes, whereof men are so far from being ashamed, that they openly commit them in the sight of the sun.

To conclude, Let every man pray earnestly to God, that he would assist him with his grace to subdue and mortify this body of sin, with all its lusts and evil affections. And such as do earnestly beg this of him, and do also make use of the means which he hath appointed to keep themselves pure and undefiled, may rest assured and well satisfied, that he who gives liberally to all men, and upbraideth no man, will either grant continence, which St. Paul calls a *special gift of God, that indeed every man hath not*; or to such whom, by not granting this, *he calls to a married state, which is honourable in all men*; he will grant a blessing in their marriage; for a good-will is said to be the gift of God, *a prudent wife is from the Lord*; and God, from whom cometh down every good and perfect gift, will certainly grant to all such as do earnestly seek to him, either one or other of these gifts, as he sees may be best for them. Therefore, to end all in the words of the same apostle, *lay aside all filibines and superfluity of naughtiness, and receive with meekness the ingrafted word, which is able to save your souls*.

SERMON XXXIV.

By BISHOP WILSON.

The eighth Commandment.

EXOD. XX. 15.

Thou shalt not steal.

As the former commandment requires chastity in our persons, so this does honesty and uprightness in our dealings; a virtue immediately founded on that first practical principle of all human converse, which our Saviour lays down, *whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, do ye even so unto them*: and recommends it to us, as the sum and epitome of all the scriptures; *for this is the law and the prophets*. A principle that carries such innate light and clear evidence in itself, that the very heathens frequently inculcate it in their writings as the primary dictate of that morality which they taught. This

is a maxim we assent to, not by any elaborate instructions, dint of arguments, or long train of consequences; but it masters our understandings by its native evidence, and springs up in us as an unpremeditated resolve of reason. Both God and nature have set up this standard in our consciences: and usually there needs no other judge of our actions towards others, than by comparing them with what, in the like cases, we would think just and fit to be done to us. It may be, we are all partial to ourselves in our present concerns; and whilst we only look that way, we may possibly seek all advantages to promote them, though to another's detriment. But reason and religion will teach us to put ourselves in their stead, and then to manage our transactions with them, as we should judge just and reasonable, were we in their condition; and therefore when we deal with others, we should first act to ourselves both parties. For instance, a servant should consider what respect he would require, was he in the same circumstances with his master, and had servants under him. Children should consider what duty and obedience they would expect, were they parents of children. Subjects, what honour and submission they might reasonably demand, were they magistrates; and so in any other relation: and when they have thus seriously pondered it in their own thoughts, let them then perform the same duties to others, in their real condition, as they judged to belong to them in that which was only imagined. For it is a never-failing rule to direct our practice, that what we judge due to us, were we in another man's condition, is certainly as due to him in his own; and if we do not so act, we betray a great deal of selfishness, and sinful partiality. This is a rule applicable to all affairs; and there is scarce any one occurrence of a man's life but he may regulate himself according to this direction; and, indeed, there scarce needs any other. Whatsoever then we have to transact with another, though perhaps we might take such advantages of him, as possibly he might never know, or be able to redress; yet let us seriously ask our consciences, if we could be content, and think it honest and just, to be so used ourselves; and if not, whatsoever the temptation be, either of gain, pleasure, or profit, let us reject it with scorn, as that which

would make us violate the first principle of common honesty among men, and contradict the laws both of nature and scripture. Was this rule more generally observed among men, the world would not have that cause to complain of rapine, extortion, oppression, fraud, and injustice, as now it hath. The rich would not grind the face of the poor, nor the poor unjustly clamour against the rich. Superiors would not tyrannize over their inferiors, nor inferiors murmur or rebel against their superiors; but an equal peace, an uniform justice, would overspread the whole earth; and *righteousness would run down our streets as a mighty stream*. And therefore let me once more recommend it, (for indeed I cannot press it too often,) that we would frequently set this golden rule before us, and do nothing to any other person which, were we in his capacity, we should think unjust to be done unto ourselves: and whatsoever we would expect from others, as our due, were we in their place, even that ought we to perform to them, or otherwise we must condemn ourselves. This is a dictate of nature and right reason; the sum of the law and the prophets. And all those various precepts which are given us in scripture, for the conduct of our lives, are but as so many lines that meet in this centre. And if we apply it to each particular command of the second table, we shall find them to be all founded on, and interpreted by this. We are required to honour our superiors, to abstain from murder, adultery, theft, false accusations, and coveting what belongs to another; and all this according to the same measures that we would have others perform these very duties to us. So that self, which is now the great tempter to wrong and injure others, was it governed by this universal maxim, would be the greatest patron of other men's rights and properties. I have the longer insisted on this, it having such general influence on the right ordering of our conversation; and because the most visible apparent violation of this natural law is, by the sin of theft, forbidden in this commandment of which I am treating.

Theft, in general, is an unjust taking, or detaining, what is lawfully another man's. He is a thief who withholds what ought to be in his neighbour's possession, or takes from him what he before possessed; for all theft presupposeth a right

right and property in another. God is the great Lord and proprietor of heaven and earth, and all things therein. *The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof*; by him, and of him, are all things; according to the pleasure of his will they are and were created; and he hath granted unto man a large charter of the world, of every thing that is good. *The heavens are the Lord's, but the earth hath he given to the children of men.* A large and regal gift, whereby he hath made over unto man all sublunary things, reserving unto himself the sovereignty and supreme lordship of all, and requiring only from man the homage and payment of obedience; and yet this large charter and donation gave no particular propriety unto any: for had man continued in his happy and innocent state, there would have been no need of meum and tuum, or any partition of these earthly possessions; but common blessings had been enjoyed in common by all. But sin entering into the world, men's desires after earthly enjoyments grew immoderate, and their attempts to attain them injurious to others; so that it became necessary to prescribe bounds and limits, that each man knowing his assigned portion, might rest satisfied therewith, and be restrained from invading and usurping on the rights of others. And there was no other way to effect this, but by human laws, mutual compact, and agreement, declaring the rights and properties of every man. So that it is law which determines property, and there is nothing ours, or another's, farther than this assigns it to us. Indeed, equity must sometimes interpose to moderate the letter of the law; for in some cases should we rigorously prosecute our right, and insist upon every punctilio we might call our due, it would become intolerable, and be a breach and violation of the law of Christ, and of charity, which requires us rather to part with our own in small matters, than to be vexatious or contentious. Thus you see how all right and property first came into the world. A general right by the donation of God; a particular right, by the sanction of laws, allotting to each man his portion; which to invade or take from him, is injustice, or theft.—But as to theft, there are many kinds thereof. The highest and chiefest is that which is committed against God by sacrilege. Sacrilege is an alienation from

God, of whatsoever he hath appropriated to himself, or that is upon good grounds dedicated to the encouragement and maintenance of his honour and service. Indeed, the alienating what hath been given to superstitious or idolatrous uses cannot be justly branded with sacrilege, for it was not so much given to God, as to ignorance and superstition; and therefore our ancestors have done well and piously, in dissolving those nests of unclean birds, the monasteries, that were so numerous and burthensome in these kingdoms. But where any thing is indeed consecrated to God, and set apart for the maintenance and encouragement of his worship and service, it is no less than sacrilege and robbing of God to alienate any part of this to secular uses. And of this God himself grievously complains, *will a man rob God? yet ye have robbed me. But ye say, wherein have we robbed thee? in tithes and offerings. Ye are cursed with a curse, for ye have robbed me, even this whole nation.* Certainly those things which are appointed for the worship and service of God, whether originally by divine right or not, yet they cannot be alienated, nor detained without involving the persons, or the nation who doth it, in a great sin; for this is to rob God of his right. Again,

Theft may be committed against men, by an unjust seizure, or detention, of what belongs to them; and this may be done, either by fraud or force; and therefore our Saviour in reciting the commandments mentions them both, *do not steal, defraud not.* This is a sin that God hath threatened with many severe curses and punishments. The temporal punishments, which the scripture pronounces, is an ample and sufficient restitution; and therefore Zacheus, when he was converted, offers a four-fold restitution to those he had wronged. *If I have taken any thing from any man by false accusation, I restore him fourfold.* And yet besides this restitution, sometimes the offenders were put to death, especially if to their theft they added cruelty and oppression. This appears in the parable of Nathan, when he had most artificially aggravated the rich man's crime in taking away the poor man's lamb, he so raised David's compassion and indignation, that he pronounces this sentence; *the man that hath done this thing shall surely die; and he shall restore the lamb*

lamb fourfold, because he did this thing, and because he had no pity. So that under the law of Moses it was in some cases lawful to punish a thief with death; though, usually, restitution was only required. Indeed our law condemns them to death; and yet we see how many persist in this wicked course of life notwithstanding that severe punishment: and if the fear of death will not deter them, that of restitution would be much less effectual. But besides the punishment of the law, God leaves a curse upon what is gotten by theft and deceit; a curse that will blast and consume all such wicked increase. Luxury and intemperance usually devour what is got by rapine; God by his righteous judgment making one sin the vengeance of another. And therefore, saith the wise man, *the robbery of the wicked shall destroy them; and, as the partridge sitteth on eggs, and hatcheth them not, so he that getteth riches, and not by right, shall leave them in the midst of his days, and at his end shall be a fool.* God many times raises up such against them as will make them refund their ill-gotten treasure. Thus God threatened the *Chaldeans, because thou hast spoiled many nations, all the remnant of the people shall spoil thee.* Such unjust acquisitions tend only to treasure up for themselves and their posterity want and poverty. And therefore if we desire to prosper in the world, and to have our substance increase and multiply, we must be sure that no gain of robbery or oppression, fraud or deceit, be found in our hands, for this will devour our lawful acquisitions.

Besides great anxiety of mind doth always accompany ill-gotten wealth. It is a sin so much against the light of nature, that conscience, if not totally hardened, will be for ever tormenting them with uneasy thoughts and reflections; for the fear of detection, of shame, and punishment incident thereto, must needs be a continual misery to them. But what is acquired fairly and with a good conscience, by an honest and lawful calling, whether more or less, it brings this contentment with it, that a man may quietly sit down and rejoice in that portion which the providence and bounty of God, his most gracious and heavenly father, hath offered him. He drinks no widows tears, nor orphans blood; he eats not the flesh of the poor, nor breaks the bones of the needy; his conscience

checks him not when feeding on what his honest labour and industry hath procured; and though it be but a bit of bread, or cup of cold water, yet is he entertained at a continual feast. And what he eats is far more savoury to him, than all the heightened delicacies of rich oppressors. Therefore better is a little *with righteousness, than great revenues without right.* For a little *that a righteous man hath, is better than riches of many wicked.* Robbery and deceit also provoke God to cut such men off, by some untimely stroke, and immature judgment; either by the hand of human justice with shame and reproach, or of divine justice with wrath and vengeance. For so it is threatened, *Thou, O God, shalt bring them down into the pit of destruction; bloody and deceitful men shall not live out half their days.* That is, they shall not live to that period which the course and strength of nature would otherwise permit; but the hand of God will cut them off in the midst of their vigour and flourishing years. But however it may be with some of them in this life, if they escape the reproach of men, and the sword of justice, yet they shall certainly be eternally miserable. Their ill-gotten goods shall not be able to redeem their souls, to bribe the justice of God, or to obtain the least solace and comfort. And what wretched fools are they, who must everlastingly perish, for gaining of things that are perishable. *Not thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God.* Where then shall their portion be but in the lake burning with fire and brimstone, that is unquenchable? where the Lord will spoil their very souls, as the wise man's expression is; *rob not the poor, for the Lord will plead their cause, and will spoil the souls of those that spoiled them.* And thus you see the various ways that God hath threatened to punish this first and greatest kind of theft, of taking away the right of another.

Another kind of theft, is oppression and unreasonable exaction; taking advantage either of the weakness or necessity of others, and imposing such unequal conditions upon them as they cannot bear, without their detriment and ruin. Contrary to the express words of God, *if thou sell aught unto thy neighbour, or buyest aught at thy neighbour's hands, ye shall not oppress one another.* Thus those who let out money

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at an extravagant interest, or rigidly exact it from insufficient persons; also the great, who force the meaner sort into disadvantageous bargains, and make them, through fear, to sell at an under-price; these, and the like, though not condemned by human laws, are yet guilty by the law of God, of no less sin than oppression, a sin hateful both to God and man. The prophet calls it, *a plucking off their skin from them, and their flesh from their bones, and chopping them in pieces, as for the pot.* All unmercifulness and hard dealings with others is a kind of theft. For the law of nature, and much more the law of charity, obliges us so to deal with others, as not to give them cause to complain of us to God; and in the bitterness of their spirits to imprecate on us the severity of his wrath and vengeance.

Again, To detain from others what is their due, either by equity or compact, is another kind of theft. How many are there whose profuse riot and luxury are maintained at the expence of the poor creditor's ruin; who often have no other satisfaction than good words, and scarce any thing to live on but tears and sighs? How many withhold the hire of poor labourers, who, when wearied out in service, cannot receive for necessary refreshment that small reward which his labours, with the toil and sweat of his own brows, required and earned. *Thou shalt not oppress an hired servant, that is poor and needy; at his day thou shalt give him his hire, neither shall the sun go down upon it. For he is poor, and setteth his heart upon it; lest he cry against thee unto the Lord, and it be sin unto thee.* And in all our bargains and agreements we are bound to perform them, though never so much to our prejudice, unless the other party will release the contract. For this is one character of a good man, *he that sweareth, and covenanteth to his own hurt, and changeth not;* but upon demand is ready and willing to perform and execute his agreement.

Another kind of theft is, in buying and selling; and this is of a very large extent: for the subtilty of man hath found out so many artifices to defraud and over-reach others, that to recount them, is almost as difficult as to escape them. Such are the false weights and measures, that are an abomination to the Lord; also false and counterfeited wares,

over-commending, or undervaluing of goods for advantage, and many other unjust contrivances, which men's consciences better know than another can suggest. The apostle hath sufficiently cautioned and threatened such men; *let no man go beyond, or defraud his brother in any matter, because the Lord is an avenger of such.* There is a day coming when the false weights shall be weighed, and the scanty measures measured, by a standard that is infallibly true. Possibly we may deal so craftily, that those whom we over-reach can take no advantage against us to right themselves by law; but we should remember, that the Great Judge will at the last day avenge them upon us. Then all accounts shall be balanced, and what remains shall be certainly paid; though not to the injured, yet to the justice of God, who is the great and universal creditor. Thus we have seen what the negative part of this command is, as to many particular instances thereof; others I could have mentioned had time permitted; and since every negative implies a positive, I shall now proceed to consider what is the duty required from us. Which is, first, That all of us should have some calling. Secondly, That we should be contented with that state and condition of life in which providence has fixed us.

First, *Thou shalt not steal;* therefore every man ought to have a calling, whereon he may comfortably subsist, and by his labour and industry, at least provide necessaries for himself and family. *He that provideth not for his family hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel.* Some there are who live without calling, such are like idle drones, that consume the labour of others; lazy vagabonds, to whom the greatest charity would be correction; who only serve to devour misplaced alms, and defraud the truly poor of relief. And we may rank with these some others who are neither serviceable to God nor their country; who have nothing of true worth in them, being the most unprofitable members of the commonwealth, and only live to kill and destroy one another in their drunken quarrels. It is certain, that those whom God hath liberally endowed with his earthly blessings have no necessity for manual employments and labour; but yet they may within their own sphere find business enough

enough to employ their time and thoughts, so as to render them the most beneficial men on earth, and make them to be loved and honoured by others; for by their authority and example, by the largeness of their income and revenues, and the dependance that others have on them, they might be as influential to promote goodness and virtue, as too often they are to countenance and encourage vice. But as some have not employment, so others have an unlawful one, whose only business is to teach and inculcate vice, and excite men to it. And how many such are there, who live by encouraging of wickedness in others, who are continually making use of all allurements to entice unto evil, recommending debauchery first to the fancy, then to the will and affections?

There are others who indeed have a lawful and honest calling, but then they are negligent and slothful; and which tends to poverty. *Yet a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep; so shall poverty come as one that travelleth; drawing nearer by soft and silent degrees.* Poverty also tempts to theft, as Solomon says, *lest I am poor and steal.* And therefore this command, which forbids theft, must by consequence enjoin labour and industry in our lawful callings. According to the apostle, *let him that stole steal no more; but rather let him labour, working with his hands the thing that is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth;* and so by industry, of a thief he may become a benefactor and alms-giver. And as this commandment requires that we should be employed in some calling; so it,

Secondly, Enjoins us contentment with that portion of earthly good things, which our heavenly Father allots us. *Be content with those things ye have.* And certainly he that is not content with what God allows him, lies under a great temptation, by fraudulent and unjust courses, to carve out his own condition to himself, and invade the rights and properties of others. Discontent and covetousness are the root of all injustice. He that thinks himself injured, because he enjoys not so much as others, will be apt, either through fraud or violence, to increase his substance by

taking from his neighbour. Let us therefore in time check this repining temper, and be satisfied with that provision which God hath afforded us; and though it be not the most delicate, or the most sumptuous, *yet having food and raiment, let us be therewith content.* Let us look upon all other things as superfluous or indifferent; and not murmur though we should never attain them. For whatsoever is necessary to our subsistence, God's providence and blessing on our industry will supply us with; and we ought not to repine for not having what we do not absolutely want.

I shall conclude this discourse by an exhortation to those who are conscious to themselves of having wronged others. Let then such know, that they are in duty bound to restore the thing stolen or purloined, if it be in their power; if not, restitution must be made another way, by an adequate, ample, and satisfactory compensation; it not being enough to confess the sin to God, and beg his pardon; but restitution of the thing, or recompence for it, with the damage sustained, must also be made and rendered, without which pardon and remission of the guilt from God can never be expected. And the reason is, because as long as any detains another's right and property, such continues in the same sin; for unjust possession is a continued and prolonged theft. And certainly that repentance of any sin, can never be true or sincere, of which though we seem to repent, yet we continue in. And without a true repentance, how can God's pardon be expected? But perhaps some will say, what if those we have defrauded are dead, how can restitution be then made them? To which I answer, in such case we are bound to make satisfaction to their children or representatives; and if there are none to be found, then we ought to dispose of it in acts of charity and piety. Some possibly may think this a very hard lesson of instruction, yet this is the rule of christianity, the inflexible laws of justice, and without complying therewith, we can have no reasonable hopes of obtaining God's pardon. For which may we all fit and prepare ourselves.

SERMON XXXV.

By Dr. HOLE.

The ninth Commandment.

Exod. xx. 16.

Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour.

As the former commandment is intended to defend our properties from wrong and violence, so this is designed to preserve our good name from slander and defamation; a good name is so excellent and valuable a thing, that the very subsistence of some, the conveniency and happiness of all, do much depend thereon. The wise man tells us, *it is rather to be chosen than great riches*; indeed the one without the other will afford but little comfort. And elsewhere he says, *a good name is better than precious ointment*; for it yields a sweet flavour to all about us, it perfumes the air we breathe in, scatters its fragrantcy abroad, and transmits the odour to posterity. And as a good name is in itself highly desirable, so is it a very tender thing, easily wounded, and sometimes incurable; for which reason this commandment was given to secure it from all unjust assaults. *Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour*. This precept being negative, I shall first consider what is therein forbidden, which in general are all the ways of injuring the credit and reputation of our neighbour, either publicly or privately; as

By bringing a false accusation, or giving a false testimony against any in courts of judicature; which is wounding of men's good name within the very letter of this commandment. This may be done, either by charging any person with what they know to be false; as that of Potiphar's wife, who charged Joseph with incontinence, when she knew to the contrary; such also were they who falsely accused our Saviour as an enemy to Cæsar, and his apostles as troublers of the world, and turning it upside down. This crime, however common, is a work of the devil, and those who practise it are the children of that wicked one. Again, bearing of false witness may be done, by concealing something that is true, where-

by great injury may happen to men; or by affirming a thing with a higher degree of assurance than our knowledge extends to. In the first case, he that kills another, in his own defence, or in the execution of justice, may be condemned as a murderer, if those alleviating circumstances are not brought to light: and in the other, he that attests a thing as certain, which he believes to be only probable, gives a false testimony, because what he asserts or swears to, may, for aught he knows, be otherwise. So that in either case, he that thus swears, is guilty of bearing false witness.

Another way of bearing false witness against our neighbour is, that of lying; a vile practice, against which we have many express texts of scripture: as, *lie not one to another, put away lying, speak every man truth with his neighbour*. The evil of lying is very apparent; for it perverts the end of speech, which is freely and fairly to communicate our minds to each other. It robs our neighbour of that debt of truth which is due to all men, and makes the tongue, which was given for the glory of God and the good of one another, to become the instrument of deceit and dishonour to both. And therefore our Saviour tells us, *that lying is of the devil, who was a liar from the beginning, and the father of it*; and they who delight therein, shall have their portion with him, in the lake that burneth with fire and brimstone.

Slandering is another instance of bearing false witness against our neighbour. And this consists in raising or spreading false reports of him, to the prejudice of his fame and character. This is too common a fault among men, who whet their tongue like a sword, which cuts as a sharp razor; wounding the reputation of others, without consideration or remorse. And this is done, sometimes, by fixing black and infamous characters on men, to their prejudice and great detriment. We find our Saviour himself could not escape the lashes of slandering tongues, for he was branded with characters the most infamous; an impostor, a blasphemer, a glutton, a wine-bibber, a friend of publicans and sinners: and his apostles were stiled, seditious, and troublers of the world: and among ourselves, how often do we hear the odious titles of proud, covetous, malicious, and the like invidious

invidious epithets, fixed on persons deserving a better character?

Detraction is another crime condemned by this commandment. Detraction differs from slander in this, that the latter is a wrongful imputation of some vice; the other is a wilful lessening of another's virtue. The one consists in a charge of evil on our neighbour; the other, in undervaluing and obscuring the good he does. This of detraction is a fault no less frequent than injurious. When the merits of any person shine forth with a brighter lustre than others, many are busy to cast a cloud on them, and fully the glory of his best actions. A detractor loves to find flaws and blemishes in the best things, and to derogate from the praise of the most worthy. He is uneasy under the commendation of others, thinking it lessens his own worth, and therefore seeks to raise fame on the ruin of others; by diminishing the good, aggravating the evil, blaming the principles, disparaging and perverting his best actions, and most innocent designs. But this is directly opposite to that part of charity which we call candour and ingenuity, for that inclines men to commend the virtues and good qualities of others, giving every thing its due weight; and instead of disclosing, will hide a multitude of sins; charity gives all persons and actions their just praise; and so far from speaking, it thinketh no evil.

Flattery is another way of bearing false witness against our neighbour; and this differs from the former, in that as the detractor takes off from another's worth, the flatterer adds too much to it, and so hurts his credit as much in the excess, as the other diminishes from it. The flatterer represents persons and things otherwise than they are, extolling some too high, and giving greater characters of them than they deserve. There are some who will celebrate such virtues in another, which they know is not in them; and others, who if they see one guilty of a vice, will conceal that and commend him for the contrary virtue, calling *evil good, and good evil, light darkness, and darkness light*, from whence have proceeded many notorious evils.

All judging and censuring of others, scoffing at, and exposing them to contempt, are here condemned, as bearing false witness against our neighbour. We

are commanded to *judge not, lest we are judged*; and Solomon tells us, *he that mocketh his neighbour is void of understanding*; that is, he doth not well consider the damage and detriment he thereby does him: for this is many times a great prejudice to the name, and also to the quiet and interest of another. These are the more open and public ways of hurting the credit of our neighbour, and are here forbidden, as bearing false witness against him. Besides these, there are other more secret and private ways of wounding another's reputation, that fall under the prohibition of this commandment; as back-biting, whispering, and tale-bearing; and which, though less observed, are by no means the less injurious; nay are oftentimes the more dangerous, by not being seen and discerned before they have done incurable evils. These sort of evil-speakers work like moles under ground; and as men may suffer more by the invisible hollowness of an earthquake than the loudest blusters of a storm, so the credit of our neighbour may receive deeper wounds by the invisible darts of secret calumnies, than by the bolder strokes of open and public slanders.

Back-biting is the speaking evil of another behind his back, by which many have greatly suffered; an enemy that comes behind and unawares, being far more dangerous than a known and declared one. Against the latter we may arm and defend ourselves, but the other attacks us cowardly when we are ignorant of his designs. And therefore we find the back-biter in the black list of the greatest sinners, and numbered with those who are to be excluded the kingdom of heaven. Whereas a good man is described to be one who back-biteth not his neighbour; and is thereby fitted to ascend the holy hill.

Whispering is that sort of back-biting that consists in relating men's failings in private. This is an artificial and very malicious way of defaming, and many times makes greater impressions than more open calumnies: for he that is intrusted with this secret generally obliges another with it, and so it is communicated to others, till it creeps about like infection, and leaves the party's reputation wounded beyond redress. These also are in the catalogue of such as are given

given up to a reprobate mind, and who without repentance shall never enter into the kingdom of heaven. Tale-bearing is somewhat a more open way of defaming, and signifies the telling tales of others as a piece of news, and to find matter of talk, which is often done to the great prejudice of men's good name; and therefore God Almighty gave an expresse charge against it, *thou shalt not go up and down as a tale-bearer among the people*. The word in the original signifies a trader in ill reports and stories of other men. This is what the Psalmist condemns in some, *who sit and speak against their brother, and slander their own mother's son; whose words are as swords, and wound even to the innermost parts of the belly*. These, besides the evil they do to men's good name, destroy the peace and quiet of the whole neighbourhood; *for a tale-bearer stirreth up strife, and separateth very friends*.

Thus we see what is forbidden in this commandment, namely, all manner of evil-speaking, both open and secret, public or private, to the prejudice of the fame and reputation of another, which is in some respect to bear false witness against one's neighbour. But because all the motives and occasions of this evil are forbidden with it, therefore the apostle commands us *to lay aside all malice, and all guile and hypocrisies, and envyings, and all evil-speakings*. To lay aside all malice, which whets the tongue against one another; all guile, which tips it with falsehood and dissimulation; all hypocrisy, in disparaging or flattering of others; all envyings, which sour men's minds and corrupt their discourses; all evil-speaking, which breeds the poison of asps under their lips: in a word, let us lay aside all pride, self-interest, evil-speaking, faction, and whatever may tend to slander and defamation. I now proceed to consider what duties are required of us in this commandment. And first,

We are to preserve the honour and good name of our neighbour. This is what St. Peter means when he commands us to *honour all men*; that is, we are to be so tender of the honour or reputation of every one, as instead of impairing, to do all we can to preserve and advance it. And this honour and esteem for all, is founded on some excel-

lency common to mankind; who have all the image of God stamp'd upon them, and should therefore, in reason, have a suitable regard paid even to the meanest person: for though some are in a more exalted station, and whose greater parts and power may demand higher degrees of it, yet some measure of honour and respect is due to that common nature of whom all are partakers; and that is to have a tender regard for the good name of every one, and to preserve all men as far as we can from reproach and contempt; for as the wise man says, he that mocketh or despiseth the poorest man, despises his Maker. It is a contempt of God to despise or vilify such as bear his image, and we debase ourselves in abusing those who are so nearly allied to us by an affinity of nature; whom we ought to honour and esteem for God's sake, and to love them for our own. We should be as tender of their character and reputation as those of ourselves. If we see a man suffer under a slander which we know to be false, we are obliged to appear in his defence, to assert and vindicate his abused innocence, and to the best of our power remove such unjust aspersions. This is implied in not bearing false witness, and is a part of justice we owe to the reputation of all men.

But further: This commandment requires truth in our words and promises; for the not bearing false witness, signifies our bearing true witness, which we are to regard in all our speeches; for a good man is one who speaketh the truth from his heart. This should be observed in public courts of justice, and in all private commerce and conversation. In courts of justice, when we are summoned to bear witness for or against any, we must speak the truth from our hearts. This is a matter of great consequence to the lives and fortunes of men, on which the safety and security of both do very much depend: and therefore the oath administered on such occasions is, that men should speak "the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth." The truth, without forging or falsifying any matter which perverts judgment and justice: the whole truth, without concealing any part out of favour or prejudice to either party, which prevents justice from being rightly administered, and may occasion much wrong: nothing but

but

but the truth; without adding any doubtful and uncertain conjectures, whereby a jury may be induced to give a hard and injurious sentence. These are the properties of a good witness, upon whose testimony men's lives and estates depend. A faithful witness will not lie, or forge any thing; but a false witness will utter lies. And, *he that speaketh truth, sheweth forth righteousness, but a false witness deceit.* All who are required to give evidence in any cause, should be careful to confine their testimony to such things only as they know to be true. For it is this that preserves the public peace and welfare, prevents injustice and wrong, and secures to us quiet and tranquillity of mind, and whereby we also promote God's glory. Joshua bids Achan *give glory to God by speaking the truth, in the matter of the wedge of gold.* By speaking the truth we glorify and reverence God's attributes, and conform to his nature and will, who is truth itself, and requires truth in the inward parts; but we highly dishonour him, by bearing false witness, because we thereby disown all love and fear of him.

Moreover, as this commandment requires truth in courts of justice, so does it in all our conversation and commerce with each other; we being enjoined to *speake every man truth with his neighbour.* In all private converse our Saviour's advice is, *that our communication be yea, yea, nay, nay;* that is, to affirm or deny nothing contrary to the truth, but to declare things as they are, without falsifying or forswearing. For these are of the evil one, who was a liar from the beginning, and the father of them; but God is truth, and his servants are stiled children that will not lie, who have a veneration for truth in all their words and actions. Truth is too sacred a thing to be prostituted, or trifled with; it being the cement and safeguard of all society, and what ought to be inviolably observed in all our communications with one another; more especially in our promises and contracts, where our words should correspond with our thoughts, and be agreeable to our purposes and resolutions in performing such agreements as we have made. It is such a serious regard to truth that can only answer the end of speech, which was given as a means to

convey our mind and meaning, and to be the instrument of intercourse and mutual confidence between each other. So that he who useth his tongue to the speaking truth, employs it as God hath appointed; but a liar contradicts and inverts the design of speech, by making his tongue instrumental to promote and propagate falsehood, deceit, and slander. Indeed, truth is what all men owe to one another; and whoever falsifies or equivocates with his neighbour, does an act of great injustice, by depriving him of that right of truth which God hath made due to every man; and he most notoriously bears false witness who speaks one thing, and intends another. And therefore,

Another virtue required in this commandment, is an honest simplicity in all our words and actions. By this the heart will be void of all evil purposes and designs, and possessed only with just sentiments and strong desires of doing good. He that inwardly designs to hurt and injure another, generally disguises his intentions by outward fair speeches, and so conceals the wickedness of his heart by the flattery and falsehood of his tongue; but he that hath good wishes for others, his tongue will not vary from his heart, nor his actions from either, but a true harmony and agreement will be found in both; even that simplicity and godly sincerity, in which all men are directed to have their conversation.

But this simplicity consists in several particulars; namely, in a freedom from all malice, which is the vilest of all the passions, stiled therefore not only wicked, but is wickedness itself; for malice is compounded of anger and hatred, but more dangerous than both. It is a secret, subtle, and mischievous passion, having the craft of the fox mixed with the cruelty of the tiger. It fills the heart with gall, tips the tongue with falsehood, and, as Solomon says, will not suffer men *to sleep till they have done evil.* But an honest simplicity of mind is free from all this; it desires all good, and intends no evil, to his neighbour; it has the wisdom of the serpent, and yet retains the innocence of the dove, and will not harm any, in body, goods, or name. And the simplicity here required is to be free from all guile, hypocrisy, and dissimulation.

tion. Such things put false colours upon men's words and actions, make them appear to be what they are not, and set them upon using much art and industry, to carry on the disguise. They that have recourse to these measures, speak one way and act another, profess the greatest respect, when their designs are most dangerous, and by fair speeches palliate the foulest actions. David complained that his greatest enemies, were those who pretended the most friendship. Says he, *it was not an open enemy that did me this dishonour, but my companion and my own familiar friend; they that eat of my bread laid wait for me. Judas came to our Saviour with, hail, master! and kissed him at the same time he betrayed him.* And St. Paul was in great perils by false brethren, who spake him fair, when they designed him the greatest mischief. This is but too much practised in our days, wherein the ancient simplicity of our forefathers is in a great measure lost, and men are degenerated into craft and subtlety, laying snares in their discourse, and traps in their ways and dealings; directly contrary to the simplicity required in this commandment, by which we are not only forbidden to bear any false witness, but are enjoined to have our speeches agree with our minds, and our actions to bear a true testimony to our words, to lay aside all guile and hypocrisy. Lastly, The simplicity here required implies a freedom from all envying and evil speaking. Envy sours men's minds, and imbitters their tongue: ill-will never speaks well, but aggravates all miscarriages; and therefore to cure these vices of the tongue, we must discard all spite and envy from our minds, so prejudicial to the good name of our neighbours, and learn that charity, which envieth not, and will not suffer us to think or speak amiss of any.

Thus we see what is forbidden, and what required in this commandment; to the former belong all the wicked arts of impairing or hurting our neighbour's credit; to the latter appertain all the good and christian methods of promoting and preserving his reputation. For the better observing our duty herein, it will not be amiss to recommend the advice of St. Paul, *study to be quiet, and do your own business.* Now, study implies

an earnest attention of mind, accompanied with diligent inquiry and endeavours after something; and the apostle making quietness a matter of study, shews the excellency of it, and that it is worth studying to attain it. That it is worth our study, the many benefits we reap from peace, and the various miseries that flow from contention, may easily satisfy us. And if we would preserve each other's good name, let us mind our own business, and not intermeddle with other men's; for they who thrust themselves into other people's concerns, generally make bold with their reputation, assuming all wisdom to themselves, and scarce allowing others enough to understand or manage their own affairs. Hence the apostle joins busybodies and tattlers together; adding, that they *wander about from house to house not only idle, but tattlers, and speaking what they ought not.* To conclude then this commandment, we are here directed to avoid all unjust ways of lessening or detracting from the honour or reputation of our neighbour, which is bearing false witness against him; and likewise to do all the right and service we lawfully can to his good name, which is bearing true testimony to and for him.

SERMON XXXVI.

The tenth Commandment.

EXOD. XX. 17.

Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's house, thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's wife, nor his man servant, nor his maid servant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor any thing that is thy neighbour's.

THESE words contain the tenth and last commandment in the decalogue; the design whereof is to regulate the inward thoughts and desires of the heart, and to keep them from all unlawful lusting or coveting what is another's. The former precepts expressly relate to the outward man, restraining the external acts of violence and injustice; but this extends to the inward man, putting a check to all secret unlawful desires, though they never come into act, and refining the heart, which is the spring of all evil, from all unjust

unjust inclinations; for out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witnesses, blasphemies. Indeed, all the laws of God are spiritual, for they reach and affect the heart; and therefore our Saviour in expounding the commandments declares, that all internal motions to sin are prohibited, as well as the outward acts.

God in this commandment expressly arraigns the thoughts, and condemns the very intention of our hearts, towards what is evil; *thou shalt not covet*. He requires us not to deprive our neighbour of his right, nor even to wish or desire it; and to abstain, not only from all unjust actions, but from all covetous inclinations. For this law forbids the sin of covetousness, or an inordinate lusting after, or desiring what belongs to another. There may be an honest and regular desire of others' goods, when confined to just and lawful means of obtaining it; since without this, there can be no traffick or commerce. None will buy or purchase any thing of another, unless he has a mind thereto; trade and commerce depend on the liking and desiring one another's goods. But then there are besides irregular desires, whereby men covet the goods of others, and would unjustly obtain them; and such are gross violations of this commandment. Some things of our neighbour's cannot lawfully be parted with, others not without great loss, inconveniences, or reluctance; in such cases, to desire our neighbour's goods, is an evil covetousness; and which leads me to consider the several objects of concupiscence mentioned in this command.

We are forbidden to covet our neighbour's house; that is, not only his habitation, but whatever he is rightfully possessed of; these he ought quietly to enjoy, without any secret wishes or desires of ours after them. It was Ahab's sin to covet Naboth's vineyard; and we shall be as guilty to covet our neighbour's house, or farm, unless in an honest way, when the owner is willing legally to part with them, on terms that are just and right. We are forbidden to covet our neighbour's wife, because this should not be; for whom God hath joined together, let no man put asunder. No consent of parties can dissolve the bonds of wedlock, or violate the laws of chastity; and therefore all such desires must be sinful; for they being made one by mutual agreement and

God's institution, their hearts must not fray from each other, nor others run towards them. To covet or withdraw the affection of either is a manifest breach of the laws of God and nature. We are forbidden to covet our neighbour's servant, whether man or maid; for these are part of our neighbour's goods, made so by mutual covenant and promise; and by the laws of God and man, he hath a right to their labour and service, which none may lawfully desire or deprive him of. Indeed, a master and servant may lawfully part by consent, or he may remove an idle unfaithful servant, and then they are free to any other; but none may secretly wish for, entice, or seduce another's servant, for this is a breach of justice and charity, and creates difference among neighbours. This is to do to another what we should not like to be done to us, and is very contrary to that love and kindness we ought to bear to one another. We are forbidden to covet our neighbour's ox or ass; that is, any of his cattle, flock, or herd. In these things our neighbour has so just a property as may not be invaded so much as by a wish, for then it possibly would go farther; coveting will lead to purloin and embezzle; for next to desiring is defrauding: and therefore this commandment checks the first motions and tendencies to such evil; for it cautions us not only against robbing and stealing our neighbour's cattle, but forbids all thoughts and desires leading thereto: nay, so far from coveting or hurting his cattle, we are to save and succour them in all their wanderings; for our Saviour commands, that if our neighbour's ox or ass fall into a pit, we should help him out, and if he goes astray, to bring him home. Lastly, We are forbid to covet any thing that is our neighbour's; the former part of the command relates to things of weight and consequence; and that we might not think ourselves at liberty to desire the smallest matters belonging to our neighbour, it is added, *nor any thing that is his*. Some there are, who will own it unjust and unreasonable to covet another's house, wife, servant, or cattle, and yet think a little corn, grass, wood, or apples, such trifles as not to be minded; and so are apt to indulge, not only their hearts in coveting, but also their hands in purloining of them. But this commandment corrects all such mistakes, by requiring us not to covet any thing

thing that is our neighbour's, he having an equal right to small as well as greater matters; and he that violates God's authority in the one will soon do it in the other; for many by using to pilfer in little trifles, have proceeded to things of greater value; which should make men avoid the beginnings of this vice, and not to meddle with their neighbour's property in the lowest matters. Thus I have shewn the sin forbidden in this commandment.

But it must be remembered, as before observed, that all the motives and inducements to any sin are also prohibited with the sin itself: and we shall find many evils condemned by this law, leading to the great sin of covetousness. As first, discontent with our present condition is forbidden in this commandment, as an occasion of coveting; for he that likes not his own circumstances, will covet what he should not; and thinking he hath not enough, will be ever uneasy and desirous of more. Discontent deprives men of the comfort of what they enjoy: Ahab could take no pleasure in the glory and greatness of a kingdom whilst he coveted Naboth's vineyard; for he came to his house heavy and displeased, he laid him down on his bed, turned away his face, and would eat no bread. This folly leads men to fraud and injustice. The apostle declares, that they who being uneasy at their present fortunes do covet to be rich, *fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, that drown them in destruction and perdition*. Discontent with our condition, says the wise man, *frets the heart against the Lord*; as if he dealt hardly with them, and denied to give what they desired or deserved. It makes them find fault with the dispensations of divine providence, as thinking other men's lot better than theirs; and which leads first to coveting, and then purloining what is another's. Envy is another sin forbidden in this commandment, as an occasion of this evil concupiscence. This is an effect of the former, and naturally leads to covetousness. For he that is discontented with his own condition, will envy others; and that naturally begets inordinate desires and hankerings after it. This sin offers great indignity to God, for it will not allow him to dispose of his own blessings. The envious person would have things ordered, not by the wisdom of the divine will, but his own fancy and humour; he would be the sole

carver of his own and other men's fortunes, and therefore grudges and murmurs if any have more than he thinks proper; which is a great affront to the wisdom and authority of our Maker. It is also high injustice to our neighbour to covet what is his, and repine at his prosperity, when we ought to rejoice thereat: nor is it a small injury to a man's self, for it destroys the peace and tranquillity of his mind, and deprives him of all the comfort he might reap from the prosperity of others; this envious coveting of another's property, serving only to fret and gall his mind, to weaken his body, and bring leanness and rottenness into his bones. Another occasion of coveting here forbidden is, an immoderate care and anxious solicitude for the things of this life; for which reason our Saviour gives a strict caution against it; says he, *take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on: Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment?* Not that our Saviour here condemns all prudent moderate care about earthly things, nor requires us to cast off all thoughts and concern for our body; we being commanded to *provide things honest in the sight of all men, and not to be slothful, but diligent in our business*. But our Saviour's charge is, not to give way to any anxious, perplexing, or solicitous cares about these things; such as to distrust God's providence, or to put men upon inordinate desires and endeavours after what is not their own; for these destroy property, disturb the peace and order of the world, violate the laws of God, and bring destruction to the souls of men; and therefore our Saviour uses many arguments, whereby to cure such carking and immoderate cares.

For he sends us to the fowls of the air, and the beasts of the field, *who sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns, and yet our heavenly Father feedeth them; and are we not much better than they?* To check all solicitous thoughts about meat and drink, he minds us of the provision made for all inferior creatures; how he feeds the ravens, and will not suffer a sparrow to fall to the ground; and can we think he will starve his own children? To cure all anxious cares about raiment, he sends us to the lilies of the field, *to consider how they grow, they toil not, neither do they spin; and yet, says he, Solomon in all his glory, was*

peace

was not arrayed like one of these: and if God so clothe the grass of the field that to-day is, and to-morrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe us? Lastly, He shews the vanity of all such carking and distrustful cares, which can neither add *one cubit to our stature*, nor one grain to our estate without God's blessing; which will sooner be obtained by a devout dependance on his providence, than by all the anxious and indirect arts of our own contrivance. These, together with idleness and pride, are the principal motives and occasions of that sinful concupiscence condemned in this commandment, which we must carefully watch against, as the enemies of our souls, and the obstacles of our salvation. In a word, let us subdue the first motions of discontent, envy, and ambition, which will otherwise betray us into greater evils; for by suffering our hearts to covet, we let loose our hands to picking and stealing, and shall thereby incur the miseries and punishments both of this life and the next.

Having considered the negative part of this commandment, which forbids all coveting or desiring what belongs to others, I shall now proceed to the affirmative part of it, which instructs us in what is required; namely, contentment with our own condition; according to the apostle, *let your conversation be without covetousness, and be content with such things as ye have*. In treating of this great duty, I will shew the nature of contentment; the reasonableness of it; and lastly, propose some directions for attaining it. — Contentment is such a satisfaction of mind in any condition, as to be easy to one's self and others. True contentment springs from the mind; it ariseth not from the abundance of outward things, which often brings disquiet, but from the inward frame and disposition of the soul, that thankfully enjoys, and prudently acquiesces, in whatever portion is allotted. Therefore St. Paul declares, *that he coveted no man's silver, or gold, or apparel, but had learned to be content with his own estate*. Indeed, with any estate that should happen to him; for he *knew how to be abased, as well as how to abound; both to be full and to be hungry, to abound and suffer need*. Contentment is such a well-pleasedness with our condition, as to render us easy to ourselves. *The good man, saith Solomon, shall be satisfied from himself*. He hath such a spring of joy and peace from within, as keeps him from

murmuring and repining, and makes him cheerfully to receive whatever God is pleased to allot him. And the good effect of this virtue not only renders him easy to himself but to all others; for contentment preserves us from all the evil effects of envy, and makes us rather to rejoice than repine at another's prosperity.

But the reasonableness of this virtue of contentment will more plainly appear, if we consider, that whatever our state and condition may be, yet it is allotted by God, the sovereign disposer of all things, from whose bounty flows all that we receive. *The earth is the Lord's, and the fullness thereof*, which he bestows on the sons of men as he thinks fit. We are debtors to him for our very being; we are made by his power, and daily supported by his providence, for *in him we live, move, and have our being*; so that we ought rather to be contented and thankful for what we have, than murmur and complain for what we want. And as we can claim nothing as our due, neither can we challenge any thing as our desert; for we *are less than the least of all God's mercies*, and can merit nothing at his hands. We should therefore be content, and receive with gratitude what we have. And if to the sovereign right and title of Almighty God, we add the consideration of his wisdom and goodness, we shall see far greater reason to be content with our portion; for what we have is allotted us by an all-wise and gracious hand, who knows what is better for us than we can do for ourselves. We often wish and long for those things that will do us more harm than good. But God in his wisdom best knows what is proper and fit for us, and dispenses his goodness to us in such proportion, as most tends to promote our welfare; and therefore we ought, in point of interest, as well as conscience, humbly and thankfully to acquiesce in what he orders: for to be dissatisfied with our condition, is, in effect, to prefer our judgment to his, and to think ourselves wiser than God. And to be displeased with his allotment, is the ready way to forfeit our Maker's favour, and provoke him to recall what we have, instead of giving more. Besides, there is a peculiar happiness attending contentment; for a contented mind is always easy: it creates a constant, calm, an undisturbed tranquillity within; but discontent and envy disquiet the mind, and raise a perpetual

petual storm in the hearts of men. Content is true happiness, the blest estate of heaven, the joy of glorified saints, and of the spirits of just men made perfect; who are not only pleased with their own joys and blessedness, but delighted with those of others: but discontent and envy are the passions and torment of wicked spirits, whose own uneasiness, like so many furies, makes them tear and devour one another.

Lastly, I shall prescribe some rules for the better attaining this excellent art of contentment. And as this useful virtue is seated chiefly in the mind, we must begin there, and endeavour to bring our minds to our condition. The reason why so few attain this art is, because they take not the right method. Men are solicitous enough to bring their estates to their minds, which, being too large to be satisfied with earthly things, is a vain attempt; for he that *loveth silver shall not be satisfied with silver, nor he that loveth abundance with increase*. But to act rightly, we must labour to bring our minds to our estate, and to rest satisfied with whatever the divine wisdom and goodness allots for us, which better knows what is fit for us, than we can do for ourselves. Again, in order to be content with our condition, we should consider that all earthly things are insufficient to make us happy. Some weakly imagine, that if they could arrive to such an estate, or attain such a degree of honour, dignity, and preferment in this world, they should then be so happy as to be satisfied without seeking or desiring more; and yet when they have obtained their wish, they find their cares and troubles greater, and themselves more uneasy than before: and therefore, Cyneas the philosopher wisely told Pyrrhus, on his informing him of the designs he had on Rome, Sicily, and Carthage, that if he could not be content with his own kingdom, neither would he be satisfied with the whole world. Indeed such things will not satisfy us, for they rather increase, than allay the thirst of the soul. So that let the world flow ever so much upon us, our desires will run faster and exceed them. Wherefore it will be our wisdom to fix our affections on higher and better things.

To learn this lesson of contentment, we must subdue all pride and haughtiness of mind, for he that is highly opinionated will think he hath not what he deserves; this will make him repine, desire more,

and envy others: but he that has humble thoughts of himself, will be thankful and content with any thing. We must also be diligently employed in that business and calling wherein God hath placed us, for that will secure his blessing on our endeavours, and bring us content. *The blessing of God (saith Solomon) maketh rich, and bringeth no sorrow with it.* He who hath that, is rich in any condition, and doth not want a competency. It is idleness that occasions want, covetous, and envious thoughts, which industry chases away, and leaves no room for. We must also take care to live within the bounds of our estate; for he that exceeds it, will contract debts that unavoidably lead to danger and discontent. Frugality, temperance, and honesty are excellent helps to contentment, there being a blessing annexed to these things, which brings peace to the mind, and prosperity to our affairs; but extravagancy and dishonesty are ever attended with a curse, which disquiets the mind, diminishes the substance, and lays a foundation for misery and trouble. Again, if we would get and preserve a contented mind, we must more observe those who are below, than such as are above us; for the splendor of greatness is apt to dazzle the eye, to create envy and discontent. he that too much admires the wealth, honour, and power of another, will be easily induced to envy their happiness, and be discontented with his own condition; but if he looks below him, and considers how many want what he enjoys, this will teach him to be content and thankful for his own allotment. Nature is content with a little: he that lives by the necessities of nature is easily supplied; but he that feeds a carnal and sensual appetite, multiplies his wants, and makes artificial necessities, which drive away contentment. Lastly, To acquire the grace of contentment, we must learn to fix our trust and dependence on God, who hath promised never to leave nor forsake us. He alone is able to satisfy the cravings of our souls, to supply the wants and necessities of our bodies. All other things leave us when we most need them; they are of no use in time of sickness, the hour of death, or day of judgment; and therefore, let us not *trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who giveth us all things richly to enjoy.*

Thus I have shewn what is required and forbidden in this and the other commandments;

mandments; and the wise man's *conclusion of the whole matter is, fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man*; and which our Saviour hath comprised in the love of God and our neighbour.

The fear of God will restrain us from *having any other Gods besides, or before him*, which is the first commandment. He that hath this holy awe and reverence for the divine majesty, will dread to offend him; either by the guilt of atheism, idolatry, or worshipping any rival deities. The sense of his power and greatness, as our Lord and Master, will make us to honour and serve him only. The fear of God will keep us from worshipping him contrary to his word and will, as by images or pictures, which is the thing forbidden in the second commandment. He that truly fears God, will not worship the creature instead of the Creator, much less give his glory to graven images. The sense of God's jealousy of a rival, and the vengeance he hath denounced against such and their posterity, should teach us to worship God, as he hath commanded, in spirit and in truth. The fear of God will keep men from profaning his sacred name, and beget a veneration for it, which is the substance of the third commandment. The want of this holy fear and reverence is what makes men venture so boldly to take God's name in vain, by rash and false swearing; to invade his property by sacrilege, to despise his ministers, and detain their maintenance from them; to pollute his sanctuary by profaneness, and to think meanly of persons, places, and things, dedicated to his name: but did we stand in awe of God as we ought, we should not dare to sin thus against him. Did we truly believe, the *Lord will not hold them guiltless that thus take his name in vain*, we should more honour his holy name, and avoid detracting from it. Lastly, The fear of God will make us remember to keep holy the sabbath-day, and to have a due regard to the times set apart and devoted to his service, which is required by the fourth commandment. If we fear God, we shall not profane those days by working at our calling, much less by following the works of sin; but rather conscientiously rest from all our labours, the better to attend God's worship, and the exercises of religion: especially considering the liberal allowance God hath given us, of six days in the week for our use, and re-

serving only one in seven for his own service. And surely he that hath any fear of God, or honour for him, will be afraid and ashamed to deny him this. Thus we see how the fear of God runs through the first table of the law, and at once comprizes and enforces the duties we owe to God.

The next thing to be considered is, the duties we owe our neighbour, contained in the commandments of the second table, which are only performed by keeping of them. By observing the fifth commandment, we discharge our duty to all our superiors; which is to honour our parents, both natural and civil, and to obey those that are set over us in church and state; to which we are encouraged by the promise of long life here, and eternal bliss hereafter. By keeping the sixth commandment, we perform the duty we owe to one another's lives, and the body and soul of both; which is to take the best care we can of the health, safety, and welfare of each, and avoid maiming, murdering, and destroying of either. By observing the seventh commandment, we discharge the duty we owe to our neighbour's wife; we abstain from all uncleanness in thought, word, and deed; and *keep our vessels in sanctification and honour*; we preserve a pure and inviolable chastity, and are thereby true to our marriage vows and promises. By observing the eighth commandment, we perform the duty we owe to our neighbour's goods and substance; which is not to steal, take away, or withhold his right from him; and not to over-reach him by any methods of fraud or deceit, nor lessen his substance by robbery or oppression; but to use our best endeavours to preserve, promote, and advance his prosperity. By keeping the ninth commandment, we discharge the duty we owe to the credit and good name of our neighbour; which is, not to blast it, by bearing false witness, lying, slander, and defamation; nor to undermine it by secret whispering, tale-bearing, and backbiting: but as much as possible to silence all vilifying and detracting language of other men; to vindicate every one from unjust aspersions, and endeavour to preserve the reputation of others. Lastly, By the tenth commandment we are restrained from all unjust covetous desires, and from indirectly obtaining what belongs to our neighbours; and are thereby taught to be content with what is truly and honestly ours, and willing

that all others should also enjoy what is their right and property. Thus, as our duty to God is included in the fear of him, so our duty to our neighbour is contained in keeping the commandments; which two things are so full and comprehensive that the wise man calls them, *the whole of man*.

For this is the whole duty, end, and happiness of man. This is the whole work and business incumbent on man, and about which we are to employ ourselves in this world; not that we are to neglect the duties of our calling, and to have our minds always on religion; but that we must make it our main and chief business, and prefer it above all other. To *fear God, and keep his commandments*, is a matter of universal concern to all men, none are exempted; this being the whole duty or principal business that belongs to every man. This is the end of man; for God gave him faculties above other creatures, that he should honour, fear, and obey him. He is not distinguished from brute beasts so much by reason, as by religion and the fear of God; so that this is the whole essence and end of man: and to fear God and keep his commandments will qualify and prepare us for happiness, and secure to us our future bliss. It will raise our natures to their highest perfection, and conform us to the divine nature, which nothing but the practice of religion and virtue can do. So that this is the whole work and business, the end and design, the interest and happiness, of man; all which are so many powerful arguments to persuade us to the practice of it.

From what hath been said, let us learn to live always in the fear of God, and that will keep us to our duty: let us often meditate on the infinite power of God, which is able to punish all offences, for *if we set him always before us, we shall never do evil*: let us not fear men whose power can reach no farther than the body or goods, but *fear him who can destroy both body and soul in hell*: let us consider and reflect on his impartial justice, and frequently have in remembrance his infinite mercy, that we may *fear the Lord for his goodness*, and dread to offend his justice: let us live in constant obedience to his commands, then shall we perform our duty to our neighbour, and thereby *keep a conscience void of offence, both towards*

God and man. For what doth the Lord our God require of us, but to fear and serve him, to walk in his ways, and keep his commandments? for this is the whole of man; always remembering that God will bring every work to judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good or evil.

SERMON XXXVII.

By DEAN MOSS.

Of the Efficacy, Necessity, and Duty of Prayer.

MATT. vii. 7, 8.

Ask, and it shall be given you: for every one that asketh, receiveth, &c.

IT is an inquiry of the first importance, to know upon what the efficacy of prayer is founded, and how derived. One great cause then of the efficacy of prayer, is, the benignity of the divine nature, which we call the goodness of God, whereof the whole earth is full. Whatever is needful, or convenient; comfortable or desirable; whatever we either want, do enjoy, or may expect; is always plentifully flowing from that inexhaustible source. To this fountain we more especially owe all those blessings that we receive in answer to our prayers; which is sufficiently evident from the illustrations which our Saviour makes use of on the occasion: *For what man is there of you, says he, whom if his son ask bread, will he give him a stone? or if he ask a fish, will he give him a serpent?* that is, will he give him what is useless and hurtful, instead of what is necessary, fit, and proper? *If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your heavenly Father, which is in heaven, give good things to them that ask him?*

The argument carries with it a strong conclusion: for if a parent's affection powerfully inclines him, however covetous he may be, to supply the necessities of his children, and provide for their welfare; much more will the infinite goodness and liberality of God extend itself to those who make their supplications to him: for he bears to us the relation of a father, and has a tender care for us, infinitely beyond that of the most

most indulgent earthly parent. He is ever ready to hear our prayers, and will liberally give whatever he knows to be really good and fit for us; and unless we render ourselves incapable of it, he will not withhold from us the best of his gifts; for he will give the aid and comfort of his holy spirit to them that ask him. And as the efficacy of prayer is chiefly founded on God's goodness and beneficence, so it depends upon his wisdom, veracity, and power. The wisdom of divine providence appoints prayer as the necessary means of obtaining what we want; the truth of his sacred promises assures us that those means will be effectual; and by his power it is accomplished. O God, *the eyes of all wait upon thee, and thou givest them their meat in due season. Thou openest thy hand, and satisfiest the desire of every living thing.* This dependance on God is both reasonable and necessary to preserve in our minds that submission, duty, and gratitude, which we owe to the bountiful Creator, for the use and enjoyment of his manifold gifts. And for our encouragement herein, the word of truth declares, on God's part, the acceptance of this our homage and service; and his power assures us of a return answerable to our prayers. *The Lord is nigh unto all them that call upon him, to all that call upon him in truth: he will fulfil the desire of them that fear him: he also will bear their cry, and will save them.* And in the words of the text, *ask, and it shall be given unto you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you, &c.* So that God's veracity is expressly engaged to perform what his providence has wisely ordered, and his power is able to effect. If we ask, we shall obtain.

But what adds much to the force and efficacy of prayer, is the merit and mediation of Jesus Christ: for however the goodness of God inclines him to be gracious unto us, yet he will not hear sinners; their prayers are an abomination to him. His wrath must first be appeased, and his justice satisfied for sin, before his mercy will shew favour to the sinner. Therefore did Christ *appear once in the flesh, to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself.* And since God has delivered up his own son for us all, how shall he not with him freely give us all things? For he is

able to save us to the utmost, if we come unto God by him, since he ever liveth to make intercession for us. The power with which Christ is invested shall never cease, and the merit upon which he pleads can never be exhausted. On this we may raise and fix our hopes, that whatsoever we ask of the Father, in the Son's name, he will give it us: for all the promises of God in Christ, are sure to be performed, which is the great confirmation of our faith, and a pledge of security, that our prayers shall be heard and answered: so that when we pray for pardon, grace, and salvation, we have the claim to these, as having the earnest of the Spirit already in our hearts, which entitles us to all that is necessary to complete our happiness. For the same blessed Spirit, that is the author of those gifts and graces, the first fruits of which all christians do partake, is the helper of our weakness, the sanctifier and furtherer of our prayers, and a secret but powerful intercessor for us. *The Spirit helpeth our infirmities, and maketh intercession for us, with groanings that cannot be uttered.* I proceed to shew how great the efficacy of prayer is.

And doubtless it is vastly great and extensive. Mighty things are said of it in scripture. *The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.* But though the delegation of the power of prayer, by our Saviour to his disciples, extended to natural impossibilities, and was perhaps accompanied with miracles, and a divine faith; yet the faith which we now exercise in prayer, is, I apprehend, of the same kind, though not in degree, with those who were extraordinarily gifted and enabled to work miracles; at least the common measure which is now dealt to all, by the operation of the same spirit, must be sufficient to procure all ordinary blessing, necessary to our real happiness and everlasting salvation; and even capable of farther encrease, as the greater glory of God, and the good of his church may require. Upon the whole then, the efficacy of prayer is universal and unlimited, and all things with God are possible by prayer; but yet there are some necessary conditions required, upon which the success of it is suspended, and without which prayer cannot be effectual. For we are not to imagine, that God ordained prayer, merely as an instrument, to enable

ble us to force his blessings from him, or to subject himself to the necessity of giving without discretion, what we may ask without reason. No; but it is requisite in the general, that our prayers should be in all points agreeable to the will of God. For *this is the confidence that we have in him, the Son of God, that if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us.*

The particular conditions arising out of this general one, may respect the matter of the petition, the state of the person, and manner of the address. The matter of the petition, if we would hope for success, ought to be lawful and good, fit and expedient, and not interfering with God's wise counsels and decrees. The state of the person, if he expects to be answered, should be that of a righteous man, or one who sincerely desires and endeavours to be truly penitent for all his sins. The manner of his address ought to be with all humility and reverence, as in the sight of God; relying with steadfast faith upon the goodness and truth of God's promises; referring the accomplishment to his wisdom and power, in his own time; persevering therein with earnestness, in proportion to what he prays for, asking for the best things first, with the greatest ardour and affection, and praying moderately for what is of an indifferent nature; expecting the event with patience, receiving it with contentment, and entirely resigning himself into the hands of infinite wisdom and goodness. Such as these are the necessary conditions of prayer, and when thus qualified, *every one that asketh, receiveth; and he that seeketh, findeth; and to him that knocketh, it shall be opened.* And when these conditions are neglected, let not any man wonder, if his prayer returns empty and without a blessing.

The matter of our petitions ought to be lawful and consonant to God's laws, or they cannot be agreeable to his will; and whoever offends herein, knowingly, is a presumptuous wretch, and his prayers are an abomination: if he does it ignorantly, he is guilty of rashness, in hastily uttering any thing before God, that is not fit and proper: nor is it enough that our petitions are lawful, unless they are also consistent with God's mind and will, such as he requires, and

will accept. But we may be assured, that if we pray for spiritual blessings, we shall constantly be heard. God will *give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him.* These are good things, perfectly free from all mixture of evil, are entirely well-pleasing to God, and which we can never too immoderately desire, or too much solicit their continuance and increase. And if we *seek first the kingdom of God, and the righteousness thereof*, all things necessary and convenient for this life, shall be added unto us. It is also requisite, that the matter of our petitions should be fit and expedient; fit for God to grant, as not interfering with his wise and just decrees, or obstructing his glory; and expedient for us to receive, as likely to prove beneficial to us. And it is but reasonable to entrust all our affairs in the hands of infinite wisdom and goodness, and to suffer God to dispose of his own as he sees most conducive to his glory and our real benefit. It would be unreasonable and absurd to expect any thing from him upon other terms. Nay, his wisdom and goodness is such, as not to grant his creatures what they ask, unless it be really expedient for them. And perhaps this is not the least of God's mercies: for was he to give whatever some men desired, it would be the greatest curse that God could inflict.

Happy therefore for us, that we are in the disposal of the great Creator and Preserver of men, who knows whereof we are made, and remembers that we are but dust; who wisely suits his gifts in proportion to our wants and capacities; of which we are very incompetent judges, being too often misled by blind and ungoverned appetites. But the goodness of God is still more conspicuous in denying us some things really good, and yet making an abundant compensation by giving some other thing, that is far better. Such denial or disappointments are great and most certain proofs of the tender care God has of the righteous, and of his watchful providence over them. Thus when David so earnestly prayed for the life of his child, which might have been a blessing to him, God denied him that request, and yet pardoned his sin, which was by much the greater favour. Thus St. Paul prayed thrice, that the thorn in his flesh might depart
from

from him; but though his prayer was not granted, yet he received more than equivalent for it, even the promise of God's grace by an immediate revelation. *My grace is sufficient for thee; for my strength is made perfect in weakness.* From what has been said, it is evident, that our petitions ought to be lawful, and not contrary to God's will; good and desirable, such as God will accept, and also which he can grant consistently with his own glory; and both needful and expedient with respect to men.

It is also required that the state of the person who prays, should be that of a righteous man, for it is the *effectual, fervent prayer of the righteous man only that availeth with God.* By a righteous man we are not to understand, one who is without sin, and perfectly innocent; for there is *not a just man upon earth, that doth good and sinneth not*; but such as comply with the terms of the gospel, in forsaking their sins and amending their lives, is here meant. All such persons will be graciously accepted and esteemed as righteous in the sight of God. This evangelical righteousness implies a well-grounded faith in the merits and mediation of Christ, an unfeigned repentance for our past sins, and a steadfast purpose of amendment; without which no man ought to present himself before God, for he heareth not sinners, but only those who believe in him and our Saviour, and endeavour to do his will with sincerity of heart. As to the conditions which respect the manner of our addressing the Almighty in prayer, they are these following:

Humility and reverence. A sinner, however penitent, will find sufficient reason to be humbled, as having acted against his truest interest, his clearest reason, and many obligations of duty and gratitude; so that when he comes to confess his sins in prayer, he ought to abase himself before God, to revere his dread majesty whom he hath offended, and to adore his infinite mercy, who is still ready to accept his repentance. Another condition is a steadfast faith: I mean a perfect reliance on the goodness, truth, and all-sufficiency of God, through the merits of Jesus Christ, without any diffidence about the event; not that this faith implies a confident belief that we shall infallibly obtain whatever we pray for, there being

not always just grounds for this, but only a general affiance in God, waiting with all modest assurance for an answer to our prayers, but referring the time and method to his all-wise providence, who careth for us, and relying without fear or doubt on God's blessing upon our lawful endeavours. Earnestness and perseverance are also necessary in prayer; *men ought always to pray, and not to faint*: not that God is to be wearied out by our pressing importunities, or that his blessing should be extorted from him; but our importunities is the best testimony we can give of an affectionate obedient heart; especially when we pray, as his words direct, for spiritual things with the greatest vehemency and fervour, and for temporal with more indifference and moderation, for those that are absolutely good with an earnest desire, and for others with an entire resignation to God's wisdom and goodness: and if God delays his answer and keeps our hopes in suspense, we must still daily reinforce our petitions; we must not doubt nor distrust his truth and goodness, but persist in our prayers without wavering or fainting; this is acceptable in his sight, and will recommend us to his favour. Lastly, We must pray with such a degree of purity and innocence in our thoughts and actions, as to render us sincere and upright towards God. If we would approach his presence with hopes of acceptance, we must cleanse our hands, purify our hearts, and study to be holy, as he is holy. If we draw nigh unto God with an humble reverence, an obedient faith, a persevering trust, and a sincere heart, still labouring after greater perfection, then will he draw nigh to us, and bestow upon us his favour and protection, his blessing and assistance, the full pardon of our sins, and the free gift of other good things. And this brings me to shew the necessity of prayer.

By prayer is meant the act of devotion, wherein we more immediately address God, humbly confessing our sins, unfeignedly begging his pardon, imploring his grace and bounty to supply our spiritual and temporal wants, interceding for others, and giving him thanks and praise for all the blessings he has mercifully bestowed upon us. And this is a duty absolutely necessary, whether we respect God or ourselves. With regard to God, it is our bounden duty and service;

vice; and as to ourselves, we can neither live comfortably nor be happy without it.

Prayer is evidently a duty to God, it being a dictate of nature, and engraven on our hearts. Man by his own reason is sensible of the dependency and impotency of his condition, of the corruption and pollution of his nature, which makes him seek for succour to the first, supreme, independent cause of all things, the fountain of his being and happiness; and the most natural way of addressing God is, for us humbly to prostrate ourselves in prayer, deprecating the divine displeasure, imploring pardon and acceptance, with the continuance of his manifold tender mercies: and this has been the universal practice of mankind; even the heathens, who were wretchedly mistaken in the object of their worship, and deified almost every thing animate and inanimate, yet still they prayed when there was no ear to hear, nor voice to answer. Again, Prayer is a necessary duty we owe to God, because it is the highest act of adoration, implying an awful sense and due apprehension of God's attributes and perfections, and suitable affections and behaviour towards him. In prayer we own his infinite knowledge, presence, and power, and this begets faith and reverence: in confessing our sins and imploring his pardon, we own his holiness, justice, and mercy, and this produces godly fear, tempered with love: in applying to him for help in all our necessities, we testify our belief of his good providence, and this raises our trust and dependance upon him: in making intercession for others, we acknowledge his all-sufficiency, and this tends to increase our faith, love, and confidence: in rendering him thanks for all his benefits, we glorify his great name, and give testimony for our own gratitude; this preserves a sense of our reliance on him, and makes our religious affections warm and vigorous. So that prayer is a most essential part of the worship of God, and therefore a necessary duty: a duty commanded both in the Old and New Testament: *Offer unto God thanksgiving, and pay the vows unto the Most High. Call upon me in the day of trouble, I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me.* Our Saviour and his apostles inculcate the same duty: *Watch unto prayer. Pray without*

ceasing. So that we may be convinced of the necessity of this duty, by the light of nature, and the authority of scripture, and incited to the practice of it by the example of our blessed Lord himself.

And yet there are some men who confine all religion to good honest morality, as they call it, and regard the outward acts of religious worship as mere formalities, in particular this of prayer; which they think not necessary, because God is infinitely wise, and knows all our wants and desires without our information, and that his infinite goodness will incline him to do us good without our importunate solicitations. But though our prayers cannot inform God, nor our importunities properly move him, yet he wisely and justly requires both at our hands, as well for his own honour, as it is a homage due to the Lord of heaven and earth from us his creatures, and also for our benefit, as it tends to exercise our faith, inflame our zeal, and to make us humble and thankful. Again,

Prayer is likewise necessary with respect to ourselves, as a means without which we cannot expect to be happy, either in this life or the next: for man is frail and feeble in his constitution, his life is a tender thing, often lost by the very air that gives it being. We are exposed to many wants and dangers, which of ourselves we cannot supply nor prevent. We naturally desire happiness, and eagerly pursue it in various shapes, but in vain; for there is no stability, no satisfaction in earthly things: so that the providence of God, and the light of his countenance, must be our only stay and comfort, and heaven our last resort. And it is prayer alone by which we may present ourselves before the throne of grace, and make our requests known unto God, in hopes that he who *heareth prayer, will not hide his face from those who diligently seek him.* And this indeed would be a reasonable hope, did not our sins interpose to set us at an infinite distance from God, for we are all transgressors of his law, debtors to his justice, liable to his wrath and vengeance. This, added to our natural infirmities, must needs amaze us with the terrors of a guilty mind, and a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation. And the only remedy we have, is heartily to repent of our sins, to pray that God will pardon them,

them, and by a well-grounded faith rely on the merits of Jesus Christ, who is our propitiation: for if we confess our sins, *God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.*

But we must also *watch and pray, lest we enter into temptation; for though the spirit indeed be willing, yet the flesh is weak*: its lusts and frailties will entice us to sin; and therefore we must always earnestly pray, that the grace of God may be sufficient for us, and our strength made perfect in weakness. So great, so indispensable a duty is prayer; whether we consider ourselves as men and sinners, or as sojourners on earth, and probationers for eternity: since without prayer, we can have no hopes or assurance of God's protection or pardon, but must live without comfort here, and in endless misery hereafter.

And because we are ignorant of the will of God, and know not how to offer up our prayers so as to be acceptable to him, it is absolutely necessary that we should be instructed in this our duty: and therefore our blessed Saviour hath not left us without a remedy for our natural ignorance and blindness, but hath taught us how to pray: for the form he has given us is so perfect, that it comprehends all things necessary or fit for us to ask, and is a model so plain and easy, as that we may from hence frame the matter and manner of all our devotions.

We are directed in this divine form to begin, as becomes us, with the glory of God, which should be our first aim and ultimate end; desiring it may be effectually promoted by the practice of true religion, by its real influence on our hearts, and by an entire obedience to God's will in the whole course of our lives. We are then to ask for such things as are necessary for the support of life, that we may live happily; we proceed to implore God's mercy in the pardon of our sins, without which we must be miserable; and for our better security, we beseech God not to withdraw his grace from us, lest we be overcome by temptation and fall into great sins; and in the conclusion, we acknowledge God's glory, dominion, and power, and consequently our own dependance, and the just title he has to the

homage of our prayers, and the tribute of our praises. Thus divine has our Lord taught us to pray, and happy we if we come to God in prayer, with suitable affections and dispositions.

And though prayer be an immediate address to the throne of God, and that we ought to approach him with all that awe and reverence which becomes poor creatures in the presence of their great Creator, and vile offenders at the tribunal of their just Judge; yet this should not prevent our loving him as an indulgent father, nor shake our faith in him as a merciful redeemer, but the whole performance should be animated with such a fervent zeal as becomes those who are sensible of their own frailties and sins, and who earnestly desire the comfortable assurance of finding rest to their souls, through the merits and mercies of Christ. And that we may attain this heavenly frame of mind, these devout affections, we must apply for the special aids of divine grace, and then the Spirit of God will help our infirmities. *We know not what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us, with groanings that cannot be uttered.* The Spirit intercedes for us, as it excites and instructs us to pray, and inspires us with suitable affections; it helps our infirmities, as it aids our weak endeavours, and assists our natural impotence and deadness of affection: and this gracious assistance of the Spirit may safely and truly be called the gift of prayer. I have only time to make a short application from what has been said.

And if prayer be thus absolutely necessary, as being a principal part of divine worship, a duty not only suggested by the light of nature, but expressly commanded in scripture, taught and recommended both by the doctrine and example of the holy Jesus: if we are also encouraged to the practice of it, by many general promises recorded in holy writ, and assured, *that whatever we ask the Father in the Son's name, he will give it us*: if we have these great encouragements added to our many obligations, let us not neglect so important a duty: a duty incumbent on us, and which will procure us the blessings of heaven and earth. It is God's singular grace and favour to admit us into his presence, and our great privilege

privilege and honour that we can approach him, to make our wants known. But if we slight his favours, and deny him his just homage; if he calls, but we refuse and regard not; then will he hide his face from us in time of need; then will he laugh at our calamity, and mock when our fear cometh. Again,

If prayer be such a necessary means, that without it we can neither live comfortably here, nor be happy hereafter, then ought we to be constant and fervent in our devotions, as we tender the blessings of this world and the next: for if our blessed Saviour, who knew no sin, prayed until he sweat drops of blood; if he who was ministered to by angels, yet frequently had recourse to prayer, and sometimes continued all night in it; what shall dust and ashes do? We, whose weakness is so much, whose wants are so many, whose dangers are infinite, whose sins are so odious in the sight of God: why, let us not be deterred or discouraged from addressing ourselves to the throne of grace; for those things which for our unworthiness we dare not, and for our blindness we cannot ask, God will vouchsafe to give us, for the worthiness of his son Jesus Christ our Lord. And to help our natural ignorance and spiritual darkness, he has left us a most absolute divine form of prayer. Let us use this to our own comfort, and in obedience to him who taught us, being assured, that nothing can be more acceptable to God than the words of his beloved son, in whom he is well pleased; and not doubting but what we compose after this perfect pattern, is also according to God's will. But should we find in us a lifeless indisposition or secret aversion to prayer, and think ourselves unable to withdraw our affections from the world, to raise and fix them where they ought to be, yet let not this tempt us to imagine the thing impossible; but let us continue to pray that we may learn to pray; for prayer is a gift attainable by exercise, assisted by God's grace. *And the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities*; not by sudden infusion, but by working together with our endeavours, gradually enlightening our minds, cleansing our hearts, spiritualizing our affections, and at last sanctifying us wholly to the service of God.

SERMON XXXVIII.

By ARCHBISHOP TILLOTSON.

The great Duty of Family Religion.

JOSHUA, XXIV. 15.

But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.

JOSHUA having brought the Israelites into the promised land, his great desire was to establish them in the worship of the one true God, who had brought them out of Egypt, and given them the possession of the good land of Canaan. And finding himself weak and declining, and fearing lest, after his death, the people should fall from the true religion to the worship of idols, he, like a wise and good governor, considers how he might keep them firm and stedfast in their religion, and prevent their defection to idolatry. To this end he calls a general assembly of all the people of Israel, and in a very eloquent speech gives them a brief historical account and deduction of the great mercies of God to them and their fathers, from the days of Abraham to that time. From the consideration of which he earnestly exhorts them to renew the covenant with God, and solemnly to promise, that they would for ever *fear the Lord, and serve him in sincerity and truth; and put away the gods which their fathers served in Egypt, and serve the Lord.* And then in the text, as if they had never engaged themselves to God by covenant before, he leaves them to their free choice and liberty: *And if it seem evil unto you, to serve the Lord, chuse you this day whom ye will serve, whether the God whom your fathers served on the other side of the flood, or the Gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell.* Not that they were at liberty whether they would serve the true God or not, but to insinuate to them, that religion ought to be their free choice; and that true religion hath those real advantages peculiar to it, as to recommend it to any considerate man's choice. As if he had said, *if it seem evil to you, after all demonstrations God hath given of his miraculous preservation of you, and the mighty obligations he hath laid upon you, by bringing you out of the land of Egypt, and the house of bondage, by so outstretched an arm, and giving you a rich land to possess: if after all this, you can quit the service of this God,*
and

and worship the idols of the nations, whom you have subdued, and their vanquished deities: if you can think it reasonable so to do, which sure you cannot, then take your choice, and chuse you this day whom you will serve. And to direct and encourage them to make a right choice, he declares his own resolution, as a pattern and example for them, in which he is fixed and immoveable, whether they will follow him or not; *but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.* So that what he said was in effect this: I have proposed the best religion to your choice, and I both think and hope you will all stedfastly adhere to it; because it is so reasonable and wise, so much for your interest and happiness: but if you will be so weak, so wilful, and so wicked, not to discern and embrace the truth, though you should all make another choice and depart from the true God, to the worship of idols, yet for my part I am stedfastly resolved, in a case so manifest and reasonable, that no number or example shall prevail with me to the contrary. For if this whole nation should revolt from the worship of the true God, and join in the worship of idols, and my family was the only one left in the whole world who worshipped the God of Israel, I would still persist in this resolution, that *as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.* A resolution truly worthy of so great a prince and so good a man; and which is a double pattern to us, first, that we should, if occasion was, stand alone in the profession and practice of the true religion; secondly, by recommending the pious care of a good father and master of a family, to train up those under his charge, in the true religion and worship of God. *As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.* But at this time, I shall only treat concerning the duty of family religion.

And this duty is the more necessary to be considered, not only as being an essential part of religion, but as what is strangely neglected in our loose and degenerate age; for next to our personal homage and service to almighty God, and the care of our own souls, it is incumbent on us to make all who are under our charge and authority, God's subjects, children, and servants; which is a more honourable and happy relation than what they bear to us. Our children are a natural, as the rest of our family are a civil and political part of ourselves; and we, and all that we have,

belong to and ought to be devoted to God and his service. And they who truly fear God will be solicitous to teach it to others, especially those who are under their more immediate care and instruction. God had so great a confidence in Abraham, as to say, *I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the word of the Lord, to do justice and judgment.* God passed his word for him, that he would carefully instruct his children and numerous family in the true religion, and also charge them to propagate and transmit it to their posterity. And it is certainly now the duty of all fathers and masters of families, and an essential part of religion, that they be careful to do the same; for every man must give an account of those committed to his charge, as well as of himself, to God. I shall therefore shew wherein this duty doth consist, consider our obligation to it, inquire into the causes of the neglect of this great duty, and endeavour to retrieve the practice of it, by representing the fatal consequences attending the neglect, both to ourselves and the public.

As this duty is much better known than practised, I need not be long on this head. One principal part of it consists in the constant worship of God in our families; by daily prayers to God, morning and evening; by reading some part of the holy scriptures, especially the Psalms and the New Testament; and this is absolutely necessary to maintain and preserve a sense of God and religion in the minds of men. Besides reading the holy scriptures, the great fountains of divine truth, we should add to these other pious good books, which are plain and fit for the instruction of all capacities, in the most necessary points of faith and practice; and this we should more especially do on the Lord's day, when the whole family may be easily brought and kept together, and have the opportunity to attend upon these things. But I must not omit to recommend one thing, which is greatly neglected in most families; I mean the craving God's blessing at our meals, upon his good creatures provided for our use, and returning thanks to him for the benefit and refreshment of them. Though this is a part of natural religion owed and practised in all ages and places in the world, yet it is shamefully neglected, nay, slighted and despised, even by those who have the greatest reason for doing

doing it; I mean at the most plentiful tables, among persons of the highest quality; as if such were ashamed or unwilling to own from whence these blessings came. O crooked and perverse, foolish and unwise generation! do ye thus requite the Lord for his bounty and liberality, who is the great author of all good things, on whom the eyes of all do wait, that he may give them their meat in due season? It is a sure sign of the prevalency of atheism and infidelity among us, when so natural and reasonable a part of religion, so just and grateful an acknowledgment of God's constant and daily care and providence over us, grows out of use, in a nation professing religion, the being, and providence of God. May it not provoke God to take his blessings from us, when we deny him this just and easy tribute of praise and thanksgiving? Shall not God visit us for this horrible ingratitude, and be avenged on such a nation as this?

Another very considerable part of this duty consists in instructing those committed to our charge in the fundamental principles and careful practise of the duties of religion; instilling these into children when capable of them, line upon line, and precept upon precept, here a little and there a little; and into those of riper years, by proper means of instruction, teaching them those things in religion as are most necessary to be believed and practised. Our children and servants having been brought to read, should be taught the first principles of religion, and by reading the holy scriptures and other good books, be prepared to receive the greater benefit and advantage from the public ministry. We are carefully to instruct them in those principles of religion as are most fundamental, and like to have the greatest influence on their whole lives; such as right and worthy apprehensions of God, of his infinite goodness and purity, and that he is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity: also to impress on them a lively sense of the great evil and danger of sin, and a firm belief of the soul's immortality, and of the unspeakable endless rewards and punishments of another world. If these principles once take root, they will continue and abide with them all their days.

This work of instruction ought not to be neglected at any time, but it is more peculiarly seasonable on the Lord's day, which ought to be employed in the reli-

gious exercises of piety and devotion; particularly in the public worship and service of God, where our children and servants should diligently and devoutly attend; it being the means which God hath appointed for increasing piety and goodness, and to which he hath promised his more especial blessing: because there they have an opportunity of joining in the public prayers, and of receiving the benefit and advantage of them; and of being instructed by God's ministers in the doctrine of salvation, and the way to eternal life, and incited to the practise of virtue and piety. There they will be invited to the Lord's table, to participate of the Lord's supper, which is the most solemn institution of the Christian religion; and the frequent partaking thereof in remembrance of his dying love, those under our charge, as soon as they are capable, should be often and affectionately exhorted to. And after the public service is ended, we should read the scriptures and other good books to our families, and so should they themselves; the Lord's day being the best opportunity for servants to think seriously of religion and another world. And it is of great consequence to the preserving a sense of religion among us, that this day be religiously observed in the exercises of piety and the care of our souls: for as some time ought to be set apart for the service of religion, there is no season so proper as on this day, when all may have leisure and opportunity for it. And parents and masters of families, if they should have their children and servants in good earnest religious, they must not only allow time, but strictly and earnestly charge them to retire every day, more especially on the Lord's day, morning and evening, to pray to God for the pardon of their sins, for his mercy and blessing, and to praise him for his daily favours and benefits conferred upon them. And to this end, care should be taken that their children and servants be supplied with short forms of prayer and praise suitable to their respective capacities and abilities.

But a principal part of this duty consists in giving good examples to our families. Thus David resolved, *I will behave myself wisely in a perfect way, I will walk within my house, with a perfect heart.* We must be exemplary to our family in a constant devout serving of God, in a solemn, prudent, and unblamable conversation. The best way to make those good who are under

under our care, is to be so ourselves; without this our instructions will have but little effect, for we cannot reasonably expect that any reverence or obedience should be paid to them. The admonitions of a good man will have great power to move and persuade others to go and do likewise; but those of a bad man are languid, faint, and of no efficacy; because there is no encouragement for others to follow that advice, which they who give it do not themselves observe.

And we are under the greatest obligations strictly to perform this, both in respect of duty and interest: as to the former, all authority over others is a talent God had entrusted us with, for their good and benefit, and for the right use of which we are accountable to him. We are obliged by all lawful means to provide for the temporal welfare of our families, to feed, clothe, and give them a comfortable subsistence; but much more are we to take care of their eternal happiness, in comparison of which all temporal concerns are as nothing. It would be cruel for a father or master to suffer a child or servant to want the necessaries of life; but it is a much greater cruelty to let an immortal soul, one for whom Christ died, to perish for want of knowledge and necessary instruction how to attain eternal salvation. If he who doth not *provide for those of his own house, hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel*, because he neglects a duty which the law of nature requires; what shall be said of them who will not provide for the everlasting happiness, and prevent the eternal misery of those who are so immediately under their care and charge? Nature as well as christianity obliges us to procure the happiness of our children, for they are part of ourselves; and if they perish by our neglect, the guilt of it will for ever lie at our doors. As to servants and other relations under our charge, common humanity requires us to be concerned for their happiness, as being of the same nature with us; but considered as christians baptized into the same faith, and capable of the same common salvation, we are more strictly obliged thereto. And if we be remiss and negligent in the discharge of this duty, we can neither answer it to God, nor our own consciences; the consideration of which should effectually engage us to a faithful performance of it.

We are also obliged to this duty in point

of interest; for as religion is the best and surest foundation for the true discharge and faithful performance of the duties of all relations, it is therefore really for our own service and advantage, that those who belong to us should serve and fear God. Would we have dutiful and obedient children, diligent and faithful servants? Nothing will so effectually procure this, as to have the principles of religion and the fear of God firmly settled in them. Abraham experienced the good success of his religious care, both in his son Isaac, and the chief servant of his house, Eliezer of Damascus. What an unexampled instance of respect and obedience did Isaac give to the commands of his father, when, without any reluctance, he submitted to be laid upon the altar, and to be slain for a sacrifice, had not God interposed and prevented it by an angel. What an excellent servant was Eliezer to Abraham? How diligent and faithful in his master's service? so that he trusted him with all he had. And when employed in his son's marriage, what prudence and fidelity did he shew in the discharge of that great trust, having no rest till the business was accomplished? These are two powerful instances to encourage fathers and masters of families to a religious care of their children and servants. Again:

How did the fear of God secure Joseph's fidelity to his master under a great and violent temptation? He had nothing to restrain him from so lewd and wicked an act, but the consideration of the great trust his master had reposed in him, the sense of his duty, and above all the fear of God, which preserved him from consenting to so wicked an action. *How can I, says he, do this great wickedness, and sin against God?* Hence it appears to be our duty, and demands our greatest care, to instill the principles of religion into those that belong to us; for if the seeds of true piety be sown in them, we shall reap the fruits of it. But if our children and servants are not taught to fear and reverence God, how can we expect they would regard and obey us? For nothing but religion obliges conscience; men will break through all other ties when a fair opportunity offers. And as religion is necessary to procure God's favour, so is it to secure the mutual duties and offices of men to one another. I proceed

To inquire into the causes of the shameful neglect of this duty, to the great decay

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of piety among us; and this may in part be ascribed to our dissensions and differences in religion, whereby, under pretence of conscience, a boundless liberty has prevailed, and the religious order of families hath been in a great measure broken and dissolved. Some men, under colour of serving God a different way, according to their consciences, do wholly or chiefly neglect the worship of God; if they do not worse, I mean frequent places of debauchery and lewdness. And this is a great hindrance to masters of families, to bring their servants up in an orderly way of religion; and which ought to convince us of the necessity of endeavouring a greater union in matters of religion, that we may all be united in our worship and devotion, and serve God in one way; by which means the work of religious education and instruction will be more effectually carried on, and a steady authority and decent order maintained in families. And till we are better agreed in matters of religion, and our unhappy differences are laid aside, and that the public worship of God do in some measure recover its reputation, the good order and government of families, as to the great ends of religion, is not like to have any considerable effect. Which should make all men who heartily love God and religion, to consider seriously how necessary it is to put an end to these differences, that we may both in private families and public assemblies, *with one mind and with one mouth, glorify God, even the father of our Lord Jesus Christ*. I therefore beseech you, in the words of St. Paul, *that there be no divisions amongst you, but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind, and in the same judgment*, so far as is necessary to keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace; and to prevent divisions and separations among christians. I proceed to the last thing proposed, which is, to shew the fatal consequences attending the neglect of family duty, both to the public and to ourselves.

First, to the public. Families are the first seminaries of religion, and if persons are not there prepared, especially in their tender years, for public teaching and instruction, little can be expected afterwards. The neglect of a due preparation of our children and servants at home, to make them profit by what they hear and learn at church, is an error productive of the greatest mischief; because, if no care be

taken of them in their younger years, when most capable of religious impressions, we cannot reasonably expect any great good from them afterwards. For if the fear of God hath not been planted in them, they will be bad in all relations; undutiful children, idle and unfaithful servants, scandalous members of any church, unprofitable to the commonwealth, disobedient to governors, both ecclesiastical and civil; nay, burthens on earth, and as so many plagues of human society. And if no remedy be applied to this evil, it will continually grow worse, and in every age diffuse and spread itself, till impiety and wickedness, infidelity and prophaneness, have over-run the world, and made it ripe for destruction, as it was in old time, when *the wickedness of man was so great upon earth, all flesh having corrupted their way, that the flood came and swept them all away*.

Secondly, The consequences of this neglect will also be very dismal to ourselves, who will first feel the inconvenience of our own guilty negligence. For we can have no security of the duty and fidelity of our family to us, if they have no fear of God nor sense of religion. So that besides the shame and sorrow, we shall have the first ill consequence of their miscarriages; and the wickedness they commit after, will, in a great measure, be charged upon us, and put to our account in the great day of judgment. And we ought to tremble to think with what rage and fury our children and servants will then fly in our faces, for being the cause of their eternal ruin, in not taking due care to prevent it. In that day, next to God, and our own consciences, our children and servants will be our most terrible accusers if we neglect to instruct them in the way of salvation. Let us therefore resolve with Joshua, that we and our houses will serve the Lord; that so, by God's grace, we may by our future care and diligence discharge this important duty, and repair our former neglects. And if children were carefully educated, and families regularly and religiously governed, what a happy delightful place, what a paradise would this world be, in comparison of what it is now? Let these things sink into our hearts before it is too late, and whilst the evil may be remedied, that we may not for ever lament this neglect, and repent of it when past redress, and there will be no place for repentance.

SERMON XXXIX.

By BISHOP MOOR.

The great Duty of public Worship.

PSAL. xxii. 52.

My praise shall be of thee in the great congregation; I will pay my vows before them that fear him.

My design from these words is to shew the necessity of the public worship of God, and to represent the great benefits and blessings we may expect from praying to God, and giving him thanks in religious assemblies, where people meet on purpose for his service, according to the example of David, who being delivered from terrible dangers, was not content with returning thanks to God in his closet and family, but he renders praises to him in the great congregation; that sacred place, where the people were assembled together, to celebrate the divine goodness and mercy.

But before I proceed in this argument, it will be proper to observe, that it is not my intention to lessen our value and esteem for secret and family prayers, which are absolutely necessary to be daily performed; for indeed the public service and private devotions have an entire dependence on each other. Our closet devotion will dispose us for family prayer, and that will engage us to worship him publicly, and with awful reverence in his own house. But if we have so little concern for our immortal souls, as scarce to offer one serious prayer to God all the week, it is not likely that any act of religion will be acceptable to him on the Lord's day; for if we have no sense of religion at home, it will be only mere form in the church, which will not please God, nor have any influence on our lives. And yet all of us have more frequent occasions to pray, than we have opportunities to serve God in public, so that we must but faintly desire to obtain the kingdom of heaven, if we are content only to address God in his house, when we hourly stand in need of his mercy and favour: for every evil thought should immediately be opposed by prayer and resolutions against it; every good inclination be cherished by begging present help of God to promote it; every surprise into

sin be instantly lamented and asked pardon for, and every blessing and unexpected mercy have immediate thanks returned to our kind benefactor: and this in all times and places as there is occasion, which sufficiently proves the absolute necessity of private devotions. Besides, in secret prayer, we ought to confess all our particular sins with their several aggravations, by which we shall be more fully convinced of the guilt and folly, and heinous nature of them; this will shew us the danger of an impenitent state, and render us more sensible of the want of God's pardon, more desirous of and grateful to him for his mercy. But a general confession of sin, is only proper for a public congregation.

I will now propose some reasons and considerations, in order to shew what obligations we are under, to offer unto God prayers and thanksgivings in the public congregation; and what spiritual comfort and advantage we may from thence hope for and expect. Public prayer is one of the most solemn acts of worship we can render to God; for by our thus devoutly worshipping of him, we manifest to others the high esteem we have for his most excellent nature, and testify our just sense of his power, wisdom, and goodness. By imploring his help on all occasions we acknowledge his Almighty power, which nothing can resist; by begging his directions in matters of difficulty, we own his unsearchable wisdom, from which no design or contrivance can be hid; by trusting ourselves and affairs with him; by relying on his gracious aid and assistance; by earnestly intreating his pardon for any breach of his holy laws; we profess that God is infinitely good and gracious, of great mercy and loving-kindness to them that love and serve him. And the more constantly and more publicly we admire, praise, and magnify these perfections of the divine nature, the more acceptable will it be to God, and the more useful to men, who by our good examples will be induced to imitate us in public acts of piety and religion. Nor can we better evidence the profound veneration we have for God, than in great assemblies to humble ourselves before him, and acknowledge his sovereignty and dominion over us; so as the affections of the mind correspond with the behaviour of the body, and that such acts of worship are

not lip service, but proceed from our hearts. And as to the constant performance of this duty, we can never be discharged from it, so long as goodness and power continue inseparable from God's nature, and want and weakness from ours; so long as all our enjoyments are from him, in whom we live, move, and have our being.

If then we duly and carefully employ our thoughts upon God's all-perfect nature, which existed from eternity, and is without bounds, infinite and immense; if we also deliberately consider, that this pure and perfect being is our sovereign Lord and great benefactor, who advanced us into that noble rank of creatures which bear his glorious image; this will so influence us to give testimony of our honour, fear, and love of God, that we shall, in the assembly of the saints, pray with earnestness and humility, hear God's word with attention and concern, and partake of the Lord's supper with thanksgiving and devotion.

And as God bestows his blessings and favours on great numbers of people, so are they obliged to join in returning public thanks to God for it; since it is but just and natural, that grateful acknowledgments should be made, in proportion to the good which is received. There are also national benefits, both of a spiritual and civil nature; of the former are all such as where men enjoy the doctrines of true religion and virtue, without the addition of opinions that are repugnant to the attributes and perfections of God and the clear reason of man; and where, with decency and order, God is worshipped in spirit and truth, free from the mixture of superstition and idolatry; and of the latter, are all such blessings as those partake of who live under governments, where their lives, goods, rights, and properties are preserved and protected: all these and many other common mercies, are public and standing instances of God's bounty towards men, which therefore require an open and united return of thanksgiving and praise.

It should be farther observed, that as there are many causes and occasions for general thanksgivings, so are there just motives and reasons for public fasts and humiliations. The long enjoyment of God's mercies often makes men forget from whence they came, and the condi-

tion on which they are granted; and may not God remove the light of the gospel, when men slight and despise it, and will not reform their minds and manners? May not this provoke him to corrupt the air they breathe in, and destroy the fruits of the earth, with storms and tempests, or swallow them up by earthquakes? and when we apprehend the danger of any of these judgments, or do actually suffer under them, ought we not in duty and interest, not only every one personally, to grieve alone for his offences against the Almighty, but also in the most solemn and public manner, to weep, fast, and humble our souls before God in prayer, imploring his mercy and forgiveness, and to remove from us what we feel, fear, or dread? And if God shall be pleased to hear our prayers, and afford us relief or deliverance from any calamities, then acts of praise and thanksgiving ought to be as public as were our fasts and humiliations. For as particular favours are just reasons for our worshipping God privately, so do public mercies strictly oblige us to the performance of public worship; and even sinners by frequenting the temple of the Lord, if they have any wise and serious thoughts, may by degrees be restrained from being wicked, it being the way which God has appointed to reclaim men from sin: besides, if such do not go to church out of principle, yet the sincere devotion of others, or some passages in God's words, may be so directly pressed and pertinently applied to their own state, as to awaken them out of an ill-grounded security, and make them very solicitous to use the means necessary to obtain salvation. In short, it must be of the most fatal consequences to religion, either to lay aside, or neglect the public worship.

For in such case religion will only appear in particular families; and was God solely to be adored, and his word expounded in private houses, there would soon be an end of all religion. Many masters of families cannot so much as read the holy scriptures, which contain the will of God and the means of salvation; and to many of those that can, yet they are not capable of instructing their children and family in the necessary duties of religion and virtue. Others are of a stupid, listless temper, who never concern themselves with the thoughts of a future state, and therefore will have little

little or no care for the souls of their children and servants. But the worst scene of all is, the great number of heads of families who are profane and lewd, and have given themselves up to their lusts and passions; and how deplorable must be the case of such families, who have no better guides to lead them to heaven.

Hence some families would not be taught their duty neither to God nor man; some would be but very imperfectly acquainted with the laws of God; others would have false and mean notions of him, unworthy of an infinite perfect being, of such as favoured and encouraged vice and wickedness. The most absurd opinions would be believed, and the most impious practices reconciled with the religion that some would teach. The different opinions about God, and his way of worship, would be equal to the number of families, for every house would soon have its own religion: and when the worship of God in churches is once laid aside, and reduced to the closet, it will soon be drove from thence out of the world.

However harmless a matter therefore some may think it customarily to absent from God's public worship, and how plausible soever their excuse for it may be, yet, if traced through all their consequences, such notions will finally end in atheism, and banish religion out of the world.

But as public worship is a plain and just duty to God for all his benefits, so it began in the world, and has been preserved in all times and countries. The belief of God is not more universal than that public honour and respect is to be rendered to him. Men have reckoned the worship of God among the laws of nature, as being the voice and dictate of nature, rooted in our souls by the God of nature. For the same arguments which convince us there is a God, who made and governs the world, do as fully prove that all his creatures should glorify and adore him; and none have been more constant in the discharge of these great duties, than the people who were under the more immediate government of God, the patriarchs and good men before the law, and the Jews under it. Abraham erected altars to offer sacrifice, and pro-

strated himself before God, to express the greatness of his power and the innumerable gifts he freely bestowed upon him. The Jews, by God's command, consecrated a seventh part of their time to the honour and service of God, and a great deal more was employed about his public worship.

And the very end of our Saviour's institution supposes public worship; for it was his business to unite a body of men in the profession of his religion, by being baptized into his name, by embracing his doctrines, practising his precepts, trusting in his promises, and by partaking together of a holy feast in memory of himself. This body of men, Christ calls his church, of which he is the head, and they the members. But how can this body subsist and live without such an union, as will testify their relation one to another? and this must be by offering up joint prayers and praises to God. By baptism we are admitted into the church, and by the Lord's supper, charity and good-will are universally maintained. The promises Christ made to his disciples were chiefly to plant, direct, support, and enlarge his church: and when they desired him to teach them to pray, every petition of the form was in the plural number; so that, from the model of the Lord's prayer, it appears to be our duty frequently to join in prayer to Almighty God: and it is our Saviour's own words, that *if two will agree on earth, touching any thing they shall ask, it shall be done for them, of my Father which is in heaven.*

He also declares, that *where two or three are gathered together in his name, there he is in the midst of them.* And if divine assistance be thus promised to a few, who meet to pray, what may not full assemblies hope for, who with humble reverence and sincere affection, jointly confess their sins to God, implore his grace, and with thankfulness declare the goodness of the Lord?

St. Paul, in his wants and great difficulties, solicited the prayers of the church. *I beseech you, brethren, in your prayers to God for me, that you also will help together by prayer for us.* He was fully persuaded that the intercessions of the congregation would prevail with God. The primitive christians also thought it their duty to meet together to pray, with the hazard

of their lives, and this they would never have done, had they believed that God only required their separate private prayers. Besides, the devotions of men may be greatly increased by their joining together in prayer; for how can we behold men on their knees, humbly confessing their crimes and abhorring their vileness and ingratitude, without detesting our sins, and praying earnestly against them? Who can hear men offering thanks to heaven for God's mercies, without remembering the wonderful things he hath done? Who can see others uttering forth the praises of God, and not be disposed to bless the Lord for the peculiar favours shewn to himself? What can fill a pious man's heart more with joy, than to behold multitudes of his fellow-creatures openly declare the grateful sense they have of the patience, long-suffering, and loving-kindness of God who made them, and of Christ who redeemed them with his own blood? So that by our pious and discreet zeal in the house of God, we may by our example excite the devotion of others, and be an instrument of converting many souls to God. I will now briefly represent the great benefits that will arise from our constantly attending the public offices of religion.

In the first place, we shall hereby preserve some sense of God and religion in the minds of those who are regardless of them. There is something so agreeable to the common sentiments of mankind, in publicly praising and adoring our great Creator, that men must have gone great lengths in wickedness, before they can bring themselves to a neglect or contempt of so wise an institution; and even then it must strike them with some shame and remorse, by reminding them of their duty, when they see others joining with one heart and mouth in their applications to almighty God: for the decency and solemnity of christian worship, when duly performed, gives great seriousness to devout minds; it being a most affecting sight to behold men of all ranks unite in humbling themselves before their Lord and Saviour, to see rich and poor, the highest and the lowest, imploring those common blessings at the throne of grace, without which, neither private persons nor societies could subsist; and the public discharge of so necessary a duty has

also some good and happy influences on those who neglect it, for it gives at least some check to their impiety and profaneness, by discountenancing of them: and was it not for the frequent returns and devout attendance on those solemn assemblies, it is much to be feared that the increase of profaneness and infidelity would be such as to leave no remains of religion among us; and therefore no doubt it was that the Almighty required the Jews, under the severest penalties, *to observe his sabbaths, and reverence his sanctuary.*

Another benefit arising from worshipping God publicly is, that it gives us an opportunity of openly professing our faith and love for our blessed Redeemer. In our age, when men are grown so wanton with the blessings of heaven, as even to deny the God who bestows them; when luxury and debauchery are carried to the greatest excess, and men grow giddy with their iniquities; when they glory in *crucifying the Son of God afresh*, by following those lusts which occasioned his being put to open shame; it must afford great satisfaction to the faithful christian, to those that sincerely love their Saviour, to be able to declare in the most public manner that they are not afraid to confess him: and this cannot be done with so much advantage, as at those times and places which are immediately dedicated to God's honour and service; and when public confession is joined to public worship, and men adore the God and Saviour in whom they profess to believe, this will be a strong and convincing proof of the sincerity of their profession, because they adore and confess their Redeemer in the wisest and best manner; they rejoice in doing him public honour, in edifying and comforting one another.

It is also a great benefit accruing from public worship, that it affords an opportunity of powerfully awakening and exciting others to follow so good and so laudable an example. There is something so very moving in the behaviour of an humble devout christian, when he approaches God in prayer; there are such beauties in his devotion and deportment, which, when observed, is very affecting. I mean not noisy clamours and extatic raptures, which are offensive to all good men; but the quiet and still voice, with which a pious soul breathes out

out his prayers. And by such behaviour, in the discharge of this important duty, they excite others to the like practice, and to glorify their Father which is in heaven.

Again: By paying our vows to the Lord in the sight of all his people, we thereby in some measure become entitled to the success of their prayers, at the same time that we offer up our own. Prayer is not only a great important duty, but tends to procure all possible blessings and advantages to men, if properly discharged. From hence I infer, that whatever benefits may flow from it when privately performed, we have all reason to expect much greater effects, when jointly made, in the courts of the Lord's house; since more and greater reasons appear for the one, than can be offered for the other. For, if the eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and his ears will be open to each one's private prayers, how much more regard may we suppose him to shew to their united intercessions, in places set apart for his honour and service? If he is nigh unto all who call upon him in secret, and will hear their cry, and will help them, how much more powerful must their joint applications be, when offered with one heart and one mouth? The consideration of this ought to be one just and pressing motive to attend those assemblies, and to watch thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints.

Such are the great benefits, and many more might be added, that arise from our attendance on God's worship. The comforts of civil life are chiefly, if not solely, built upon it; our own prayers are rendered more effectual by it; we further and promote the salvation of others, and give evidence of our own sincerity; and we lay some checks and restraints upon the wicked and profane, who impiously neglect or but seldom frequent it. I shall inforce all with this observation, that the saints in heaven, in their exalted state, do worship and glorify God together; saying, *thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory, honour, and power, for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are, and were created. Blessing and glory, wisdom and thanksgiving, honour, power, and might, be unto God for ever and ever. Amen.*

S E R M O N XL.

By BISHOP WILSON.

The true Way of profiting by God's Word read or preached.

LUKE, viii. 18.

Take heed how ye hear: for whosoever hath, to him shall be given; and whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken, even that which he seemeth to have*.

GOOD christian people, I am going to set before you the great blessing of attending to the word of God, whether read or preached to you, and the true way of profiting thereby; as also the very great hazard you run, of living under the light of the gospel, and the ordinances of God, and not being bettered by them.

There is nothing more certain, than that many christians are eternally ruined for want of considering the truths they hear every Lord's day, and by not laying them to heart. They come, indeed, to the church; and they hear the scriptures read to them. They hear what God commands, and what he requires of them. They are put in mind of what must certainly come hereafter; of death, of judgment, of heaven, and of hell. And yet they return home as little affected as if these things were not true, or as if they did not at all concern them. And what is the consequence of this? Why, they are called christians, though they do not the things which Christ hath commanded them. They hope for salvation without being converted; and under this delusion they die, and go into eternity.

To prevent this destructive consequence, our Lord has given this following strict charge to all his followers: *Take heed how ye hear.* Take heed, for your salvation depends upon it, that you remember, and make good use of what you hear: for whosoever hath, that is, hath benefited by what he hath already heard, God will increase his knowledge and his graces; but whosoever hath not, that is, have not minded what they have heard, or have not profited by it, such are unworthy of more favours, and, by a just judgment of God, will be deprived of the knowledge and graces which they seemed to have.

Take heed, therefore, how you hear; that is, whether you come prepared to hear with a serious, teachable temper; with a

* See Mark, iv. 9. Heb. ii. 1, 2, 3, 4. James, i. 21. 1 Thess. ii. 13. iv. 1.

purpose to learn your duty, and to practise what you hear.

Take heed how you hear : and that you hear those only, who, by the order and providence of God, are appointed to instruct you. Never sure was more need of this caution. Many deceivers, faith the apostle, are entered into the world ; many lewd, profane, and antichristian books ; many agents of Satan, and seducing spirits ; and therefore beware and avoid them as you love your souls.

Lastly, *Take heed how you hear :* remember whose ministers you hear, whose word, whose commands, whose promises, whose threatenings, you hear. They are not the words of man, but the word of God, delivered by his own Son, confirmed by miracles, and reported to you by his own ministers.

It may be, you may imagine, that you know your duty as well as the preacher who is appointed to instruct you. Be it so. But remember, that whatever his talents and yours may be, he is a minister of God to you for good, if you hear and obey his godly admonitions. And remember too, that the most eloquent, learned man on earth cannot edify you without God's blessing. And lastly, that God has made, and can make, his word, out of the mouth of the meanest of his ministers, effectual for the conversion of those that hear them with reverence.

Well then, whoever hopes to benefit by hearing, must come with humility, and a teachable temper of mind ; must resolve to receive instruction, reproof, and advice, as coming from God ; and must strive to remember what he hears.

It will startle you, and I hope will affect your hearts, to hear the true reason why the generality of people do not profit by sermons, and by the word of God read to them. It is not I, but Jesus Christ, who tells you, that *the seed is the word of God : that those by the way-side are they that hear. Then cometh the devil ; observe that, then cometh the devil, and taketh the word out of their hearts, lest they should believe and be saved.*

You see who it is that tempts you to sit down with indifference, when the word of God is read or spoken ; who it is that suggests to your mind other matters, when you should be attending to the things which concern your souls : you hear from Christ himself, that it is the devil, and

that the end thereof is damnation. Let this dreadful truth, I beseech you, oblige you at this time, and at all times, to hearken with attention to the word of God. And remember what our Lord said to those that heard his word, and would not mind it : *It shall be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment, than for you.*

It behoves you, therefore, as ever you hope to escape this dreadful judgment ; it concerns you, I say, to come to church with a teachable temper, with a sincere desire, whether to learn, or to be put in mind of your duty ; it concerns you to hear with an humble, attentive mind, and with a full purpose of heart to order your life accordingly ; and then the word you hear will become indeed, what St. Paul calls it, *the word of salvation to every one that believeth.*

And that you may always attend to what is written in the gospel with the greatest regard, and assurance of being true and certain, take notice of and remember what was declared by God himself in a voice from heaven, *This is my beloved Son, hear ye him !*

It is not a poor ignorant creature, as I am, who tells you what you must do to be saved ; what you must do to escape eternal misery ; but it is the Son of God himself, sent from heaven for this very end, to shew unto us the way to life everlasting. It is him you hear, when you hear his word ; and it is him you disregard, when you mind not what is said to you by his ministers.

But then, because it is not sufficient for a man to hear the truths of the gospel, unless through the grace of God he applies them to himself, and considers how much he himself is concerned in them, and that otherwise he will be little the better for hearing the word read or preached ; I will therefore shew you how the most plain and unlearned christian may, and ought to apply the things he hears, every one to himself, and put them in practice. I will also shew you how the truths you hear may always suggest to your minds suitable petitions, in order to obtain the grace of God, without which all you hear, all you know, will signify nothing towards your salvation.

For example :

Suppose the sermon you heard was concerning the danger of inconsideration, or the sad effect of that little care and concern which

which the generality of christians have for their salvation :

Such a serious subject, if you minded it, must needs affect you ; and you will be apt to say within yourself, ' I see plainly, ' that if I pass my days in a wretched, ' negligent manner, without taking care ' of my soul, without considering what ' will come hereafter, whether I think of ' it or not, I can expect nothing when I die ' but misery everlasting. I see plainly, ' that I must not satisfy myself with the ' bare name of being a christian, without ' considering what the christian religion ' requires of me. If I do so, I shall be ' dealt with worse than an heathen. God ' himself has declared, that great will be ' the punishment of wicked men ; and ' great the reward, great the happiness, ' of such as fear to offend him, of such as ' are careful to obey his commands. And ' shall not this awaken me ? Shall I go ' on and live as if no harm would follow ? ' Will not inconsideration ruin me, as well ' as if I were guilty of the greatest crimes ? ' I take all possible care of my worldly ' concerns, and to avoid temporal evils ; ' and shall I not be concerned for evils ' that will last for ever ? It is true I see ' others as little concerned as I am myself ; ' but will this be any comfort to me, if ' we are all miserable at the last ?

' I should be astonished to hear a man ' say, that he does not believe one word ' of the gospel : and yet it is plain, it will ' be the same thing in the end with those ' that have not believed one word of the ' gospel, and with those that have not laid ' the truths of the gospel to heart. I am ' resolved, therefore, what I will do : I ' will go home, and beg of God to touch ' my heart with a lasting sense of the dan- ' ger I am in ; that he will give me great ' concern for my soul ; and that he will ' not suffer me to lead a careless life any ' longer.'

And you will be confirmed in these good purposes, if you shall be so happy (for so the providence of God often orders matters for our good), if you shall be so happy, as in some other sermon to be put in mind of the wretched condition of one who leads a careless and a sinful life ; and this both with respect to himself and to God.

If, for example, you have been plainly told, what you cannot but know to be true, that a person who leads a careless and a sinful life, can never be truly easy, or

pleased with himself ; that he is always doing that which he inwardly condemns ; that he is afraid of that light which would let him see the danger he is in ; and that though he has often purposed to lead a new life, yet he has as often neglected to do so.

If you have been told, what is as true as the gospel, that while you live in wilful sin, there is not the filthiest creature so odious in your eyes, as you are in the eyes of God ; that you are governed by the devil, and are in his service, and doing his work ; that every moment you put off your repentance, you are despising the goodness and long-suffering of God, who continues your life for no other end but that you may not be damned. If you hear, and are not startled at this, it is because you are given over to a reprobate mind.

Every man, who is not so given over, will certainly be afraid for himself ; and if he hears a sermon concerning repentance, and a sinner's return to God, he will probably come to some such resolutions as these :

' I am convinced, from God's own ' word, that a sinner has no other choice ' but either repentance or damnation. As ' long, therefore, as I have no hopes of ' pardon, I can have no comfort in life : ' and as long as I defer my repentance, ' I can have no hopes of pardon. And I ' see plainly, from what I have heard this ' day, that my repentance will signify very ' little, if I do not bring forth fruits an- ' swerable to amendment of life. Is it ' not a great mercy, that God will accept ' of a sinner's repentance, after he has ' done so many ill things ? Is it not great ' condescension in the Son of God to give ' us even his oath, that *all sins shall be for- ' given unto the sons of men* ; and that none ' ought to despair of mercy, but such only ' as will not be persuaded to forsake their ' evil ways ? What a mercy is it that I ' have time to repent, and to bring forth ' fruits meet for repentance ! And what a ' foolish, what a wretched creature should ' I be, if I should neglect such a mercy, ' and go on in my sins, and to my de- ' struction ! I will therefore, through the ' grace of God, not defer my repentance, ' for one moment, lest I be overtaken in ' sin, and be for ever undone.'

Some such (one would hope) would be the thoughts and the resolutions of any one, who with attention had heard a sermon concerning

concerning the necessity of repentance and a new life.

A christian that reasons thus, and thus resolves, and acts accordingly, is in the way of salvation. But that he may continue in that way, he will want to be often put in mind of the danger of backsliding; of the duties required of him, of every man, in that state of life in which the providence of God has placed him; of the sins he is chiefly to watch against; and of the means of grace which God has appointed to bring us to heaven.

For instance: You will hear the duty of prayer pressed upon all christians, as necessary to their salvation as their daily bread is to preserve their lives.

Will you return home without laying this to heart? You may, indeed, do so; but if you have any concern for your own soul, you will think better of it, and reason with yourself after some such manner as this:

‘ I now see the great sin of neglecting so necessary a duty as is this of prayer. I see plainly, that I must renounce all pretence to religion, all hopes of salvation, if I neglect it any longer. I am convinced, that all the sins I ever committed, and which I have not confessed and begged pardon for, do stand in judgment against me. And what will become of me if I die in this condition? And I have all the reason in the world to believe, that God will withhold his blessings from me, if I do not give him thanks for those I have already received. I have no reason to hope for God’s protection and blessing upon myself, upon my children, or upon my labours, when I never pray for them. I am as subject to afflictions, to troubles, to calamities, as other people: how shall I bear them with patience without the assistance of God’s grace? How shall I escape the many temptations to wickedness which I meet with daily, without praying for God’s help and direction? In short, if I neglect this duty, how shall I escape eternal misery?

‘ I am resolved what to do. I will, by the grace of Almighty God, omit this duty of prayer no longer, lest I come short of heaven, and be for ever undone. I will, as I have been instructed, take all occasions of praying to God. When I set about any business of moment, I will pray him to prosper my honest endeavours. Whenever I shall perceive that

‘ I have done any thing amiss, I will forthwith pray God to forgive me, and to give me grace to do so no more. If I am in trouble, or in distress, I will apply to the Father of mercies, and God of all comfort. If I am in any danger, I will pray him to deliver me. If I am tempted to any sin, I will beseech him to succour me. And I will not fail to give him thanks, whenever he bestows any blessing upon me.

‘ By doing this I shall be entitled to the favour and protection of God, and be always afraid of offending him.

‘ But this is not all; for I am resolved, by the grace of God, to pray with my family, and for my family, every day, as ever I expect God’s blessing to be with them and myself. By this means, I shall put them under God’s protection every morning and evening; I shall set them a good example of piety; and this is the only way to make my children and servants serious, holy, honest, and diligent. And I will, by God’s help, do this faithfully, though I should be so unlearned as to be able to say no other prayer but the Lord’s prayer: I will hope God will hear me according to the full meaning of that prayer, if I say it devoutly upon my knees, and with my family.

‘ This will not hinder my worldly business; and I will trust in God, that he will doubly pay me for the loss of any time I spend in his service.’

Every serious christian, who wishes well to his own soul, will, I say, think and resolve, when he has heard a sermon concerning the duty of prayer, after some such manner as this we have been speaking of.

Let us again suppose, that the sermon which you have heard, has been concerning the meaning, and benefit, and duty, of receiving the Lord’s supper. A serious person can hardly choose but make some such observations and resolutions as these:

‘ I have this day been invited to partake of the Lord’s supper; an ordinance appointed by Christ himself, and for this reason; that christians being often called upon to remember the love of their dying Saviour, and the occasion of his death, which was to make their peace with God, they might love him with all their soul, and remember to observe the commands he has given them, in order

‘to fit them for heaven. I am assured
‘that this is the only way to render our
‘persons and our prayers acceptable to
‘God; of obtaining the pardon of our
‘sins, the grace of God, and everlasting
‘life after death.

‘I understand what duties are required
‘to make me a worthy guest at that holy
‘table. I must resolve to forsake those
‘sins which cost Jesus Christ his life;
‘and I must forgive and love, and do
‘good to others, since he has been so
‘good and so kind to me as to lay down
‘his very life for me. I dare not there-
‘fore, I will not turn my back upon an
‘ordinance upon which my salvation de-
‘pends. If I am not fit to go to this
‘sacrament, I am sure that I am not in
‘the way of life; I must be under God’s
‘displeasure. I have nothing therefore
‘to do, but what through God’s grace
‘I will endeavour to do; and this is, to
‘prepare myself as well as I am able,
‘and for the rest to trust in the mercy
‘and goodness of my Saviour, to supply
‘by his grace what is wanting on my
‘part; and I shall easily know whether I
‘have been a worthy communicant or
‘not, by the life I lead afterwards.’

If at any time the minister of God is
pressing upon you the necessity of an holy
life, of walking worthy of your christian
name and calling, do not forget it as
soon as you go out of the church, but
think thus with yourself:

‘My punishment will surely be very
‘great, if I who call myself a christian,
‘do lead a careless and an unchristian
‘life. I see how blind those people are
‘who hope to go to heaven without en-
‘deavouring to please God and to keep
‘his commandments. I hope I shall
‘never forget a truth I have heard this
‘day, that religion, and the way to please
‘God, does not consist so much in ob-
‘serving the outward duties of christian-
‘ity, as in leading an holy life. I see
‘plainly, that a man may go to the
‘church and to the sacrament without
‘being just or humble, or devout or
‘temperate, or charitable. And that the
‘reason why we go to church, and pray
‘to God and hear his word, is this; that
‘we may obtain his grace to enable us
‘to lead a sober, a righteous, and a
‘godly life. This therefore, through the
‘grace of God, shall be my great en-
‘deavour for the time to come, to walk

‘worthy of the religion I profess, and of
‘the hopes I have of being happy when
‘I die.’

‘I have this day,’ saith another,
‘been put in mind of a truth which is
‘too little considered by christians, and
‘this is, that this life is a state of trial;
‘and that we shall be happy or miserable
‘when we die, just as we have behaved
‘ourselves well or ill in this world. I
‘see then that I may be happy if it is
‘not my own fault; and I see too, that I
‘shall certainly be miserable, if I am
‘not careful to lead such a life as may
‘recommend me to the mercy and favour
‘of God. In short, I see plainly that
‘now is the time in which I am to chuse
‘what I am to be for ever and ever. I
‘will therefore beg of God to keep this
‘thought ever in my heart, and to enable
‘me to make such a choice as that I
‘may be happy for ever.’

And you will be better disposed to
make such a choice, if you have at any
time attended to a sermon of the great
advantage of being religious. For then
you will be convinced that a firm resolu-
tion, to be governed at all times by the
laws of God, is the only sure way to
have peace of mind here, and happiness
hereafter; forasmuch as all the com-
mands of God are good, and intended
to keep us from ruining ourselves, which
we should certainly do if we were left to
our own choices; and that the ordi-
nances of the Gospel are necessary to
restore us to the favour of God, and serve
either to cure us of some sad disorder
we labour under, or to communicate the
divine graces, or to seal to us God’s gra-
cious pardon; to direct us in the way we
should go, or to keep us from backslid-
ing.

And if to this you add what you can
remember to have heard concerning *the*
reward of sin, and God’s judgment upon
sinners, you will have motives sufficient
to determine you what to do; that is,
you will conclude, ‘I have but one great
‘business in this world, and that is, to
‘*save my soul*. This is *that one thing*
‘*needful* which our Saviour speaks of. If
‘I do not mind this, it is no matter what
‘else I mind; *for he that loses his soul,*
‘*loses more than the whole world*. This,
‘by the grace of God, I will charge my
‘memory and my heart with as long as
‘I live.’

Now

Now as ever you hope to do so, you must attend to another duty which you will very often hear pressed upon christians both in the holy scripture and in sermons; and this is the duty of being always watchful and upon your guard; *because our adversary, the devil, like a roaring lion, walketh about seeking whom he may devour,* (1 Pet. v. 8.) finding them careless, or from under God's protection.

Upon hearing this, you will do well to make such reflections as these:

'I see that we are beset on all sides with dangers and temptations to sin. We are in danger from the corruption of our own nature, which is prone to evil continually; we are in danger of setting our hearts upon this world, and of forgetting that this is not the world we were made for.

'Besides these, Satan has his agents in every place tempting us to sin of one kind or other. Some to whoredom; some to drunkenness; some to swearing, cursing, lying, or slandering; others to fraud, injustice, or oppression: any one of which will shut me out of heaven and send me to hell, if I am not careful to avoid them.

'What have I then to do? Why, as I hope for heaven and happiness, I must be serious, and watch against all temptations to evil, and pray to God daily to keep me from sin and wickedness of every kind. And this, by the grace of God, shall be the great business of my life.'

Whoever knows any thing of the christian religion must know that self-denial is a means of grace without which no man must hope to be saved. *If any man will come after me, saith our Lord and Saviour, let him deny himself.* (Matth. xvi. 24.) *If thy right hand offend thee, cut it off;* that is, part with any thing, though as dear to you as a right-hand or a right-eye, rather than offend God.

It was not the preacher only that said this, but they are the words of Jesus Christ himself; who said besides, that *it is better to go into life with one hand or one eye, than with two hands or two eyes to be cast into hell, where the worm dieth not, and where the fire is not quenched.*

It is hardly possible for any serious christian to hear this duty explained, and

not to think of it even after he leaves the church, and to think thus with himself:

'I see plainly that I must resolve to deny myself, to stand against all my corrupt inclinations, or be content to perish eternally. Whatever evil ways or customs I have hitherto been fond of, I must renounce and forsake them, or I see what must follow. If an idle or a careless life have been my great sin, though the world sees no great harm in such a life, yet I see I must reform, let it cost me never so much pain and trouble, or I shall infallibly one day or other hear that dreadful sentence: *Bind the unprofitable servant hand and foot, and cast him into outer darkness.*

'If riches and the love of the world have hitherto possessed my heart, renounce them I must, let it be never so uneasy to me, or my interest in heaven, for *God and Mammon I cannot serve.* If any sinful lust or pleasure have got the power over me, and though it is become a second nature, yet I see plainly it must be renounced and forsaken, or I must never hope for heaven. If profane talk, if swearing, lying, or slandering, be the sins that are become habitual to me, and that I cannot without great pains leave them off; yet this pains I must take, or suffer the pains of eternal death. If tipling, if squandering away my time or estate, if gluttony or drunkenness, have been the sins I have lived in, these must be repented of and utterly forsaken, let it be never so uneasy to flesh and blood, or I shall have no part in the kingdom of heaven.

'In short, I have been plainly told, and I plainly see, that men need not take pains to be ruined, since our own corrupt nature, if not denied, restrained, and kept under, will ruin us without remedy. I see too that all the commands of God, all the duties which he has prescribed us, are all intended in mercy to keep us from ruining ourselves; and that if we had been suffered to follow our own wills, or the evil customs we contract, or the bad examples we meet with, we could not escape bringing upon ourselves destruction. I am left therefore without excuse, and I shall dearly pay for it if I do not deny myself every thing which God has forbidden me;

'me; and if I do not look upon his commands as the only way to life and happiness everlasting.'

Thus every serious christian will argue with himself, whenever he hears any other duty of christianity explained or recommended to his practice. If time would permit, I would shew you how this might be done to your great advantage, in many other instances of duty and religion.

All that I shall now add is, to put you in mind of what a blessing it is that you have churches to go to, and that you can hear the word of God and know his will, and what you must do to be saved. You see the great blessing of a standing ministry, and how happy it is that there are persons appointed by the Holy Ghost, who, at the peril of their own souls, are to read and faithfully to explain the truths of the gospel to you. You may indeed shut your ears, or carelessly think of other matters. You may refuse to hear with attention your duty, and the dangers you are liable to. You may return home without laying these things to heart; but then be assured of it you return home without God's blessing. You may refuse to come to church, (as the manner of some is,) and think yourselves too good to be taught, reprov'd, or put in mind of your duty; but what will this end in? Why, you will in time forget God, his commands, and all that is good, you will come at last to say with those wicked people whom Job speaks of (Job, xxi. 14.) who said unto God, *Depart from us, for we desire not the knowledge of thy ways.*

I need not tell you that such people are in the way of damnation.

I pray God keep all you from following their steps; and give us grace, that we may hear, understand, remember, consider, love, and practise what is read and preached to us according to God's holy word and will, through Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom with the Father, &c.

S E R M O N XLI.

The same Subject continued.

Luke, viii. 18.

Take heed how ye hear: for whosoever hath, to him shall be given; and whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken that which he seemeth to have *.

WHEN our Lord bids us *take heed*, we may be very sure it is concerning something of great moment, and therefore to be seriously attended to. And we find it is so here. *Take heed*, saith he, *how ye hear*: your salvation depends upon your understanding and believing what you hear: for whosoever hath; that is, whosoever hath benefited by what he has already heard, God will increase his knowledge and his graces; *but whosoever hath not*, have not minded what they have heard, or have not profited by it, such careless people, by a just judgment of God, shall lose that knowledge and those graces which he had given them.

Take heed, therefore, that you hear the word of God with a serious mind, with a purpose and desire to learn your duty, and with a resolution to practise what you hear.

Lastly, *Take heed whom you hear*: remember whose ministers you hear, whose word, whose commands, whose threatenings, whose promises, you hear. They are the ministers of God that watch for your souls. They read and preach to you the word of God, delivered by his own Son. They explain to you the commands of God, which are designed to make you happy for ever. And they put you in remembrance of the promises of God, if you are obedient; and of his severe threatenings, if you despise his goodness. Remember, therefore, what the Son of God said to those that heard this word, and would not mind it: *It shall be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment, than for such careless people.*

But having, in a former discourse upon these words, explained these things very particularly, I now proceed to shew you the true way of profiting by sermons, many instances of which I gave you in my former discourse.

* See Matth. xiii. 9. Luke, x. 24; xi. 28. John, xv. 12. Heb. xii. 14.

Let us suppose, then, that the minister of God has at any time been explaining to you the nature of a true Christian faith; the necessity of believing whatever God has made known to men; as also the danger of not living as becomes people who profess to believe such things.

If you have seriously attended to such a discourse, you will think thus with yourself:

'I am now convinced that without faith it is impossible to please God. I see plainly, that it is not a matter of indifference, whether we believe or not, since Jesus Christ himself has declared, *that he that believeth not shall be damned*; and that it is as absolutely necessary to salvation that we believe, not what we please, but *according to the faith once delivered unto the saints*.

'Our Lord himself has told us, that *if we believe not in him, we shall die in our sins*. (John, viii. 24.) And again; *he that sinneth against the Holy Ghost, shall never be forgiven*. So dreadful a thing it is not to know, or wilfully to mistake the truth!

'Whatever therefore God has revealed, must be true and certain, though I cannot comprehend it. It is not necessary that we should always know the reasons of God's will and pleasure; it is enough that we know it to be his will. It is sufficient to me to know and believe, that God would have all men to be saved. That Jesus Christ his Son has shewed unto us the way of salvation. That he has reconciled us to God. That he will be our advocate with God for our pardon, if we truly repent us of our sins. That God will afford us all manner of assistance by his Spirit, to overcome all the corruptions of our nature, and all the difficulties we shall meet with. That he will make us happy for ever if we strive to please him during this short life: and that we shall be most miserable when we die, if we die in our sins unrepented of.

'In order to prevent this sad doom, he has made known to us what are the things which we must do to be saved, and what we must avoid as ever we hope to escape the bitter pains of eternal death. He has also made known to us that all things are naked and open unto his eyes, that we may live as having him the constant witness of our words and actions. I must not therefore de-

ceive myself, nor fancy that if I should be so unhappy as not to believe or not to mind these things, that therefore I have no reason to fear what will follow; for God's word will come to pass; though all the world should not mind it.

'I see, therefore, how necessary it is to have the articles of my christian faith in my memory; and before my eyes continually; and to beg of God daily to increase my faith. I will read or hear God's word with reverence; and endeavour to lay up in my heart what I hear and understand; and, knowing that faith is the gift of God, I will not fail to ask it of God with all the earnestness of my soul; for I have been told, and do believe, that the most learned man on earth cannot convince or convert me, unless I attend to the word spoken, and ponder it in my heart, and beg of God to enlighten my mind.

'I will not be afraid to ask myself this short question, do I live by faith? That is, does the fear of God hinder me from doing what I know will displease him? Do the promises of God affect my heart, and make me desirous to be made worthy to obtain them? Do the judgments of God upon wicked people, which are recorded in the holy scriptures, make me take warning, and fear to draw down the like judgments upon myself? Have I a just value for the christian religion and its ordinances and ministers, and for whatever has any relation to God? Have I a love for the gospel, and for the truths contained in it; and do I resolve to govern myself according to them? Do I consider what a dreadful thing it is for a christian so to live as if not one word of the gospel were true? Do I hate sin as most displeasing to God, and hurtful to my own salvation? Do I distrust myself and my own strength, and put my whole trust and confidence in God? Do I constantly pray for his grace to increase my faith, and that I may be able to live as becomes my profession? If I do this in the sincerity of my heart, then I may be assured that I live by faith; and that I have a principle of a new life, which, if I do not stifle it, will in the end bring me to everlasting life and happiness.'

These, I say, will (through the blessing of God) be the fruits; these, or such like, will be the observations and resolutions

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solutions which a serious christian will make, who has carefully minded what has at any time been said upon the subject of faith.

Let us, in the next place, suppose that you have heard a sermon concerning *the love of God*. The love of God being the first and great command, it would be unpardonable for a christian to hear a sermon upon that subject without minding it, and without being bettered by it.

I will endeavour to shew you how you may be truly edified by such a discourse, if you have seriously attended to it. You will in the first place have been put in mind that God is worthy of your greatest love, and that he may justly require it of you, that you love him above all things; because he made you, and it is he who by his providence preserves you every day of your life, and who is the giver of all the blessings you either enjoy or hope for. Besides this, he intends out of his infinite goodness to make you happy for ever, if it is not your own fault. And though you know in your conscience that you have grievously offended God, yet he is ready to pardon you upon your sincere repentance. And to convince you of this, after the most kind and gracious manner, he sent his beloved Son from heaven to assure us thereof, and of his *good-will to men*; by him proposing terms of pardon and mercy upon most reasonable conditions, and eternal happiness upon performing them.

His Son also procured for us this great favour, that we might apply to God, as to a father, in all our necessities, for whatever we want in all our troubles; and this with confidence that he would hear us with the tenderness of a father.

Besides this, you will have been instructed what it is *to love God with all your heart*. That it is, to desire and to strive to please God in all your actions. To have a great regard to his laws; to what he has commanded, and to what he has forbidden. To love his word, in which his will is made known to us; and his ministers, who are by him appointed to instruct you, and to watch for your souls, as they that must give an account. It is to speak of God after the most respectful manner, that others may learn by your example to love and reverence him. It is to be pleased and rejoice when God is honoured; when things go as

God would have them; when justice, piety, and charity do thrive and are encouraged; and to be grieved when God's laws are transgressed, neglected, or despised. Lastly, It is to submit to God's will and what he orders for you; and to suffer any thing rather than knowingly and wilfully to offend God; and to deny yourself every thing which you have reason to believe will displease him.

Having heard all this with seriousness and attention, you cannot but come to some such resolutions as these following:

'I see plainly that I can have no security, no real satisfaction in life, until
'I can bring my heart to love God sincerely. In order to this, I will often
'call to mind the many blessings which I
'have received from God, that I may
'give him thanks for them, the surest
'way to increase my love for him who
'has been so good and kind to me. I
'will read or hear his holy word with
'care, that I may know his will, his
'promises, and the great reward he has
'proposed to his faithful servants. I will
'abhor and avoid all such persons, principles, company, and conversation, as
'may lessen my esteem for and love of
'God. I will not let the love of the world
'possess my heart, lest I forget God, and
'forget that he is my only good. And
'because love amongst friends is soon lost
'for want of conversing with one another,
'I will go to God daily, and lay my
'wants and my desires before him; particularly I will beg of God to pour into
'my heart such love towards him, that
'I may love him above all things, and
'that his love may be the commanding
'principle of my life.'

These, I say, or some such, will be the thoughts and resolutions of every sober christian who has attended to a sermon concerning *the love of God*. And he will be more careful to put these resolutions in practice when he considers that such as do not love God, do really hate God; (as monstrous a sin as that is;) that is, they wish that there were no such a Being to call them to an account for their wicked deeds. And they are pleased with such men and such arguments as tend to lessen their belief of a future state, and a future account. So dreadful is the sin of hating (that is, of not loving) God!

We will suppose again, that you have been instructed in the meaning and importance

portance of the second great command, *Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself*. It is probable you will have been put in mind of the great stress that is laid upon this command by Christ himself: *This commandment have we from him; that he who loveth God, love his brother also*. (1 John, iv. 21.) From which you will conclude, that nothing can more effectually recommend you to the favour of God than a love for your neighbour, since God has placed this duty the very next to the love we owe to himself. You will be careful therefore to remember, what you have learned from Christ himself, as well as from his ministers, whom you are to account your neighbour, and how you are to shew your love to him.

You will remember that every man is your neighbour and your brother, who may be benefited by your love. That God is our common father, and that all we are brethren. That we are all members of the same body, of which Jesus Christ is the head. That God has so ordered matters, that the members of this body should depend one upon another. That the poor shall depend upon the rich for their subsistence; and the rich, whatever they think of it, shall receive a greater advantage from the prayers of the poor.

You will then call to mind how you are to express your love to your neighbour. The command says, you are to love him as yourself. You know, without a teacher, how you love yourself. That you wish and take satisfaction in your own welfare and prosperity. That you are sorry when any evil or mischief befalls yourself. You do not love to have your own faults aggravated, or your good name abused; and how ready you are to find excuses for your own mistakes. In short, you know very well how you would have others to shew their love for you: and that it is no small comfort for the ignorant and unlearned, that their duty is contained in so few words, and that they can easily understand it by considering how they love, how they would be dealt with themselves.

These things considered, you will, if you have any grace in your heart, come to some such resolutions as these following:

‘I see that I am bound as a christian, and at the peril of my soul, to be just to, to forgive, and give to, and love and

‘pray for my neighbour as becomes a disciple of Jesus Christ. I will therefore do no wrong to any man, though I could hope to be never so great a gainer by it. I will not oppress, over-reach, vex, or harass others, though it should be in my power. I will not envy my neighbour’s prosperity, nor bear malice in my heart, though I could never so well conceal it. I will despise no man living for the meanness of his condition, or for the misfortunes that may have befallen him; knowing very well that we are all subject to misfortunes, to failings, to every thing that may make a man contemptible. I will be ready to do good with what God has blessed me, and even glad to communicate, knowing that with such sacrifices God is pleased. I will not render evil for evil, though revenge is sweet to flesh and blood. If any man is my enemy without cause, I will pray that God would convert him; that he will restrain and keep him from evil and mischief, which otherwise will be the greatest injury to himself. I will not say, that my neighbour does not deserve my love, for if God should deal with me according to my deserts, I should be the most miserable creature alive. I will not dare to say such a man has injured me and I will not forgive him, because God himself has declared that just so he will deal with me! I will bear with the infirmities of others, hoping that others, and especially God himself, will bear with mine. I will thus endeavour to express my love to my neighbour out of love to God, who has commanded me so to do; and because I believe it will be most acceptable to the divine majesty. And I will beg of God to give me the spirit of love; and that the love of God and of my neighbour may be the commanding principle of my life. And that every night of my life I may lie down to sleep with the same charitable dispositions with which I desire and hope to die.’

This will be the true way of profiting by sermons, and you will return home from God’s house with a blessing.

We will suppose in the next place, that you have been instructed by God’s minister concerning the necessity, the indispensable necessity, of an holy life. You would not sure go home and think no more upon a subject which it so much concerns you

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you to remember. For you will have been assured by the Spirit of God, as well as by the minister of God; that *without holiness no man must see the Lord*. That the design of all the laws and ordinances of God is, to make you partaker of a divine nature; that is, to make you holy, that you may be capable of being happy. And that we are heirs of salvation on no other terms but these: that we study to please God in the whole course of our lives; and that we must not satisfy ourselves with the outward duties of religion, which are of no value in the sight of God, if they do not help to free us from the slavery of sin, and restore us to the image of God.

And to oblige you not to be indifferent in a matter of so great concern, you will remember, that you have been often told how very different the portion of good and bad men is sure to be in the next world. And that if you make God your enemy by an unholy life, you are for ever undone.

You will then begin to think it worth your while to call to mind, in what, as you have been often told, this holiness consists. That it is not confined to the time you are at church or at your prayers, but that it must be the work of your whole life. That you must be holy in your conversation, that is, inoffensive and exemplary; holy in your dealings, that is, just and conscientious; holy with regard to God, reverencing every thing that belongs to him, hearing his word, resolving to be governed by his commands; praying to him for what you want, and praising him for his mercies. That you must be holy with respect to your neighbour; that is, you must do him no mischief; you must relieve him in his necessities; you must pray for him; and forgive him if he has injured you. Lastly, That you must be holy in what relates to yourself; holy in your devotions, that is, sincere and without hypocrisy; holy in repenting when you have done amiss, and returning to your duty without delay; holy in moderating your affections for this world, that you may *love the Lord with all your heart*. You must be holy in prosperity, that is, not high-minded; holy in adversity, that is, patient and resigned to the will of God. You must be holy in your apparel, modest and free from pride and vanity; holy in your diet, not given

to intemperance, to gluttony, or drunkenness; holy in your diversions, not making them the great business of your life.

If you are a parent, you must express your holiness in bringing up your children in the fear of God; if a master, you must be holy, that is, just to your servants, remembering that you yourself *have a master in heaven*.

In short, you will have been told, that nothing ought to discourage you from being as holy as possibly you can be; because God, who requires you to be holy, has obliged himself to assist you with sufficient grace and power; and because the more holy you are, the more happy you are sure to be when you die.

Now, if you have pondered these things in your heart, you cannot but come to some such resolutions as these following:

‘I am now convinced, that the manner of my life is the only proof of my being in the favour or under the displeasure of God. That to lead a careless, thoughtless, or a useless life, will certainly bring upon me the sentence of the fruitless tree: *Cut it down, why cumbereth it the ground?* I will therefore endeavour to please God, by being as careful of my ways, and as obedient to his commands, as his grace shall enable me to be. And since he is so good as to allow me to call him my father, I will endeavour to lead such a life as becomes the child of so holy a father. To this end, I will endeavour to understand what the will of God is, and will compare my life with those rules he has given me to walk by, that I may be satisfied whether I am, in truth, in the way of holiness or not.

‘I will not delude myself with saying, that every man has his faults, and that God is merciful: for I understand he is just as well as merciful; that he hates sin in every body; and that if my faults are such as he hates and has forbidden, and I continue in them, I shall provoke him to deny me the benefit of his mercy, and shall feel the severity of his justice. I will not therefore, as I love my own soul, live in any known sin, but will keep a strict watch over my heart and actions, and deny myself and part with any pleasure rather than displease God. Nor will I flatter myself with vain hopes,

‘ hopes, that I may get habits of holiness hereafter, and before I die; for if I think it too soon to please God now, he may be provoked to deny me his grace, and then I shall never be holy, never happy.

‘ And because good purposes, without a change of life, will signify nothing but to condemn me, I will therefore beg of God to touch my heart most powerfully from above, that I may not only resolve, but do, what he would have me.’

Such resolutions as these every christian should make when he hears the word of God read or preached. And, indeed, it is plainly for want of minding the things they hear, and for want of pondering them in their hearts, that christians are so careless, so ignorant, and so wicked. And those very people, who would not for the world deny their religion, or give up their hopes of heaven, are yet in danger of never going to heaven, because they would not hear with attention their duty nor their danger, nor ponder them in their hearts.

People do not consider, that want of learning will be no excuse in a christian country for their being ignorant of their duty. Such as will attend the church, and pray for God’s grace, and hear his word with a serious and devout temper, and practise what they know, are in as sure a way of happiness as the most learned. *Take heed, therefore, how ye hear:* and if you would indeed profit by hearing, and carry a blessing home with you, imprint upon your heart some such truths as these:

‘ This is God’s minister; what he delivers is God’s word. I mind attentively my betters when they speak to me, and I lay it up in my heart: and shall I forget what my Maker has said as soon as I am got from his presence? God forbid. I will rather go home, and consider with myself what use I ought to make of what I have heard, and will order my life accordingly.’

Do so; and God will increase your knowledge and your graces. And the word which you hear will become indeed the word of salvation (as St. Paul calls it) to every one that believeth, and so receives it.

And may our blessed Lord, who has caused all holy scriptures to be written for our learning, grant that we may in such wise hear, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, that by patience and comfort of his holy word, we may embrace and

ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life, which he has given us in our Saviour Jesus Christ.

S E R M O N XLII.

The true Way of profiting by Sermons.

LUKE, viii. 18.

Take heed how ye hear: for whosoever hath, to him shall be given; and whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken even that which he seemeth to have*.

I HAVE already, in a former discourse, explained to you what our Lord means by this earnest caution; namely, to assure us, that according to the measure of our love for God’s word, our attention in hearing it, and our care to profit by it, shall be the measure of grace which God will give us.

I have already shewed you the danger of living under the light of the gospel, and not being bettered by it: our Saviour says expressly, that *it shall be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment, than for such people*; because the word which you hear is *not the word of men, but in truth the word of God*.

This is my beloved Son, saith God, *hear ye him!* and it is his gospel we preach, we explain, we press upon you. It is him you despise, when you mind not what is said to you by his ministers.

And, on the other hand, when you come to church with a serious, teachable temper, and hear his word with reverence and submission, you do most certainly engage him to enlighten your minds with saving truth.

It was for this reason I proposed to shew you the true way of profiting by sermons; by shewing you how every christian ought and may most profitably apply the things he hears to himself, and form such resolutions as are most likely to influence his practice. I have already done this on several practical subjects, such as most nearly concern a christian life; and shall now proceed to others of like importance.

Let us then suppose, that you have heard a discourse concerning the danger of keeping bad company; of conversing

* See Amos, viii. 11. Matth. xviii. 4. Heb. ii. 1, 2, &c. 1 Theff. ii. 13. iv. 1. James, i. 21.

with people of wicked principles or wicked lives.

To be sure you will have been put in mind, how many have been ruined by an unwise choice of such companions; how many have got habits of idleness, of intemperance, of trifling away their time and their estates, have been strangely corrupted both in their principles and in their manners.

You will, with great truth, have been assured, that in all companies where men make a mock of sin, speak lightly of God, and profanely of any thing that belongs to him, there Satan infallibly governs, inspires his agents, and more or less infects all that are present: that you will in time be content to hear the most serious things made a jest of, and to wish inwardly that the things you were taught to believe were not true, and that there was no God to call you to an account.

You do not know but the company you are fond of are atheists, men under the government of Satan; if you live as they do, you will in time believe as they do, whatever at present you may think of it.

You will have been assured, that nothing more provokes God to deprive men of his holy spirit, and of his graces, than the frequenting of wicked company, where things hateful to God are said and done.

Lastly, You will have heard from the inspired writer, that *wine and new wine take away the heart*; [*i. e.* the understanding;] and every one who is given to drinking and company will find it so to his sorrow, when it may be too late to return to a sober mind; sad experience convincing us, that one need but taste a sinful pleasure, or frequent bad company a very little while, to be very fond of them, and a slave to them.

If I should observe any young person very serious and attentive when he hears these truths, I should conclude that such a person will make some such reflections as these following:

‘I thank God that I have had this fair warning given me: I am convinced that bad company has cost many a man very dear: I have within me the same seeds of wickedness with other people; and if God leaves me to my own choices, and I make choice of bad company, I shall be as wicked as the worst of them; my

heart will be infected, my faith weakened, my good purposes cooled, and all my graces injured: I am convinced of the difficulty of getting out of the snare, and of breaking off evil habits; and that if I provoke God to withdraw his spirit, I never can repent, never can return to a sober mind; I will therefore keep in my mind the words of the apostle, *evil communications corrupt good manners*; and I am resolved, by the grace of God, to avoid, as I would the devil, the company of all such by whose loose principles and lewd examples my faith may be corrupted, or my morals endangered.’

I persuade myself that all young persons, who have any grace left, will make some such resolutions as these, and will beg of God the grace to keep them.

How many discourses have christians heard concerning another reigning vice, the sins of impurity, fornication, and uncleanness, without being bettered by what either God or his ministers have said upon those subjects! They have heard, for instance, God’s express declaration, that *whoremongers and adulterers God will judge* (Heb. xiii. 4.); that *they shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone*. (Rev. xxi. 8.) That God abhors such as fall into these sins, and do not immediately repent and forsake them.

They have as often been put in mind of the difficulty of forsaking these sins; because these sins do blind the understanding, waste and harden the conscience, blot out all good purposes, grieve the spirit of God, drive him from them, and give the devil the greatest power over those that live in them. They see with their own eyes the pains people take to conceal these vices, which should convince christians how shameful they really are: and they have often heard what St. Paul has said of these sins, that *they are such as should not so much as be named among christians*.

Lastly, Christians know that God has appointed lawful marriage as a means to prevent these sins, so hateful to God, and so destructive to men: and yet this unclean spirit reigns in the world without controul; very many fall into these sins, many live in them, and too many make a jest of them.

What can be the reason of this? Why, christians when they hear these things do not mind them; they do not think of them after they leave the church; they do not ponder them in their hearts.

Young people, when they hear these things, should ask themselves some such questions as these:

‘Do I really believe, that by falling into these sins, I shall lose the favour of God, and must expect a most fearful judgment if I continue in them? I dare not say I do not believe this: and if I do believe these truths, my crime will admit of no excuse; I shall be self-condemned, and lost irrecoverably, and ruined for ever, if I go on and continue in such sins as these: I will not flatter myself that God will be merciful to me, though I continue in sin; he was the same merciful God, who for these sins destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah with fire from heaven: I am to judge by this of God’s mercy when it is abused: I will not venture upon these sins in hopes of repenting before I die; for at the best I can but repent for myself; I cannot repent for those I shall corrupt, whose blood will be required at my hands: I will not make myself easy, because I may hope to hide my crimes; for I am assured, that God will bring to light the hidden works of darkness, when the stoutest hardest heart shall be ashamed and made to tremble: I will therefore endeavour to imprint these terrors upon my heart, and preserve my innocence, as I love my own soul. I will avoid, as much as I can, all temptations to these sins; idleness, intemperance; all company that make a jest of these crimes; all people that have lost their modesty; all whom the devil has inspired with immodest stories, filthy discourse, lewd songs; in short, all that discover, by their idle talk and wanton behaviour, that they only want to be tempted, that they only want an occasion to be lewd.’

If the devil, as be sure he will, lays a temptation in my way, a young man, who has any grace left, will say in the words of Joseph on the like occasion, *how can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?*

A woman who has not quite lost her modesty will, on the like occasion, argue with herself in the words of Tamar, Da-

vid’s daughter: *I, whither shall I cause my shame to go* (2 Sam. xiii. 13.), if I consent to this foul crime?

And knowing that I have not the power of resisting temptations in my own hands, I will pray to God every day of my life to give me grace and strength to resist all temptations, which will cost me so very dear.

And such as have been so unhappy as to have fallen into these sins will repent forthwith, and be very watchful for the time to come, if they will but think seriously of the words of Christ, *that the unclean spirit will return with seven others more wicked than himself*: and then what destruction will they make!

These are the reflections that christians should make, and will make if they have any grace, when they hear a discourse of the dreadful consequence of sins of impurity.

There is another very great and very common sin very little minded; however, I would beg you would lay to heart both the guilt and the curse that attend it. It is the sin of profaning the name of God to idle or wicked purposes.

This is done every day, without fear and without thought; though it is a sin most displeasing to God, for which he will not hold men guiltless; that is, he will punish them in an extraordinary manner; because the impious custom of swearing in common conversation strikes directly at the honour of God; it makes his name, that is, God himself, contemptible; it lessens men’s esteem and reverence for him that made them; and treats him as an idol, which can do them neither good nor hurt. By this impious custom, men come to lose the fear of an oath, so that oaths and vows are no manner of rule by which we can judge whether they speak true or false. From common swearing they come to cursing themselves and others; from cursing to blasphemy, and from blasphemy to downright atheism; to say, at least to wish, that there was no God.

You will therefore, when you hear these things, as ever you hope to escape the vengeance of God; you will lay these truths to heart, and resolve with yourself as follows:

‘I will always endeavour to speak of God with an awe and reverence upon my mind. If I am called to take a solemn oath, I will consider the meaning’ and

‘ and terror of those words with which it
 ‘ is bound upon me, so help you God !
 ‘ and then I shall conclude, that as ever
 ‘ I expect the help of God when I shall
 ‘ most want it, I am bound to speak the
 ‘ very truth. As for rash, customary
 ‘ oaths, I will abhor the appealing to God,
 ‘ as every man does who swears, with a
 ‘ lie or a trifle in my mouth. If ever I
 ‘ shall be so unhappy as to be surpris’d into
 ‘ such a sin, I will immediately beg God’s
 ‘ pardon, and resolve to do so no more.
 ‘ And lest such oaths should become less
 ‘ dreadful to me, and more familiar, I
 ‘ will avoid, as I would the devil, or leave
 ‘ the company of every man who is given
 ‘ to such vices, lest I should provoke God
 ‘ to leave me to myself, and lest I should
 ‘ become as bad as the worst.

‘ That I may not take the name of God
 ‘ in vain, when I am at my prayers and
 ‘ worshipping him, I will endeavour that
 ‘ my words and heart shall go together.
 ‘ To this end I will consider, that all the
 ‘ prayers of the church begin with such
 ‘ expressions as are most proper to make
 ‘ us mind to whom we speak; that it is
 ‘ to an Almighty God, and merciful Fa-
 ‘ ther, to whom all hearts are open, all
 ‘ desires known; who is the fountain of
 ‘ all wisdom and goodness, the creator and
 ‘ preserver of mankind; whose nature and
 ‘ property is always to have mercy and to
 ‘ forgive.’

These, and such expressions, if attended
 to, will call back a roving mind, and fix it
 upon the duty you are about; will awaken
 the most careless, and melt down the most
 stubborn heart.

Whoever comes to these resolutions,
 which all people will do who are afraid to
 take God’s name in vain, will not often
 speak of God, or to God, without thought,
 without reason, and without reverence.

The next great sin to this is that of pro-
 faning the Lord’s day. You hear the
 command of God touching this sin, and
 your duty, every such day. And you
 hear your duty often press’d upon you in
 sermons; and too often you return home
 without profiting by the one or the other.

Do but consider the reason of this :
 Why, you do not attend seriously to what
 you hear; or you forget it as soon as you
 leave the church; or you do not apply the
 truths you hear to yourself, or come to
 any sober resolutions concerning them.
 For is it possible that you should hear and

believe that God has expressly command’d
 one day in seven to be kept holy : that
 he hath blessed that day; that is, he hath
 join’d an especial blessing to the due ob-
 servation of it : that it is a day dedicated
 to the honour and worship of God, and
 of Jesus Christ our Saviour : that if men
 were not on these days put in mind of the
 duty they owe to God; and if certain per-
 sons were not by his command appointed
 to keep up the knowledge of God and of
 our dependence upon him, we should soon
 lose the knowledge of the true God (as
 many nations have done), all sense of piety,
 all concern for what must come hereafter,
 whether men know, whether they think
 of it or not : and lastly, that such as do
 not keep this day holy, by going to the
 assemblies of the faithful, do, in effect,
 excommunicate themselves :

Is it possible, I say, that a christian,
 when he is put in mind of these truths,
 should ~~not~~ come to some such firm resolu-
 tions as these ?

‘ I will consider who it is that has given
 ‘ me this command : that it is he who
 ‘ gives me all my time, and who blesteth
 ‘ all my labours. I will consider what it
 ‘ is he has commanded me : why; that I
 ‘ should, for one day in seven, leave all
 ‘ my worldly cares and concerns in his
 ‘ hands, whose blessing upon one day’s
 ‘ labour is of more value than the whole
 ‘ week’s work without it : and that I should
 ‘ dedicate this day to his honour; to give
 ‘ him thanks for his care over me; to ac-
 ‘ knowledge and adore his infinite perfec-
 ‘ tions, his power, his wisdom, his good-
 ‘ ness, his truth, and his justice. And
 ‘ lastly, to acknowledge my own misery,
 ‘ without his blessing : and that I am sub-
 ‘ ject to ignorance, to want, to troubles,
 ‘ to sickness, to sin, and to death, even to
 ‘ death eternal.

‘ I will therefore resolve, as ever I hope
 ‘ for a blessing in this life, or for happi-
 ‘ ness in the next, I will remember the
 ‘ Lord’s day to keep it holy. I will go
 ‘ to the house of God, and confess my own
 ‘ unworthiness, and his infinite goodness.
 ‘ I will appear before God with my heart,
 ‘ as well as with my body. I will confess
 ‘ my sins unto God, and hope for a share in
 ‘ the absolution pronounced by his minis-
 ‘ ter in his name. I will attend to his
 ‘ word, and say a serious amen to the
 ‘ graces and blessings there prayed for;
 ‘ and I will receive, with the greatest de-

‘votion, the solemn blessing of the priest of God, by which he dismisseth the congregation; because I have the sure promise of God himself (Numb. vi. 23, &c.), that his blessing shall attend the blessing pronounced by his priest.

‘I will then return home, and consider seriously what I have heard, and then I will lay all my own particular wants before the throne of grace. I will consider, that it is God’s own day; that it is the day of giving pardon to sinners; of giving grace to the humble; of giving comfort to the afflicted; of giving strength to the weak; of giving blessings to all that call upon him in sincerity.

‘And lastly, I will pray God to deliver me from all those ways by which this good day is generally profaned. Nor will I spend that time in idleness, in sloth, in trifling, with a careless indifference, which is consecrated to the honour of God, and designed to prepare me for an eternal rest hereafter.’

Make such resolutions as these, when you hear this duty recommended and explained; and depend upon God for his blessing upon them.

When one considers what steps people take from one sin to another, till they become very often both hardened and reprobate, one must conclude, that such people never seriously attended to what the scriptures have told us concerning the deceitfulness of sin: *That if men will not retain God in their knowledge, God will give them up to a mind void of judgment, to work all iniquity with greediness.*

That this has been the case of an infinite number of people, who have fallen into crimes and courses, which once in their lives they abhorred the thoughts of; that the most profligate sinners did once hate those vices they now are so fond of, and were afraid of that God, whose threats and judgments they now never mind or fear; that most people, before they were corrupted, did blush, and start, and were ashamed of doing a base or an unworthy thing, which now never disturbs them; that when men have once lost the fear of God, they will do what pleaseth themselves, though all the world sees their folly, and what their end will be; and that there is no wickedness that can be named, which such people have not at last fallen into. We have very many scripture examples which confirm this truth.

A prince (David) beloved of God, but giving way to his lusts, first corrupts the wife, and then murders her husband. His son, (Solomon,) by the same steps, falling into gross and senseless idolatry.

Another great man (Hazeal) asking the prophet, *Am I a dog, to do such things as you say I shall one day come to do?* which yet he afterwards did without scruple.

By these instances you should be convinced, that neither the greatest wisdom, nor the best education, nor the greatest favours of God, nor the good opinion we may have of our own sense and resolutions, can secure us, when we once give way to our own appetites to do what God has forbidden.

You see a common swearer. You think little of it. You esteem it a frailty only. You do not see the end of this sin; that it leads to impiety, to perjury, to atheism, and damnation.

You see a tipler, or a drunkard. The sin is so common, you mind it not. You do not see the end of it; his family and his affairs are neglected; God and religion, and his soul, are the least of his thoughts or concern; he grows sottish and thoughtless, contracts distempers, and dies hardened, or in despair.

You see another given to lewd, filthy, or profane talk. You laugh with him, and see no harm in it. You would tremble if you could see what this leads to. He grows debauched, becomes fearless of offending God, hardened in wickedness and infidelity, and is taken off in his sin. This does not affect you, because you are yet alive.

If people will despise the Lord’s day, neglect the ordinances, refuse to hear God’s word, or to know his will, he will withdraw his graces; they will grow more careless, and at last professedly wicked, and ripe for judgment.

You have often heard what St. Paul observes, that infidelity, the not retaining God in their knowledge, was the occasion of the vilest sins that ever were thought of. You may be assured of it, the same cause will at all times have the same dreadful effects.

In short, the beginning of sin is not regarded; but one evil habit certainly begets another, till men forget God, till God forsakes them, and leaves them to themselves; till they have filled up the measure of their sins; and till God sends upon them swift destruction.

Well

Well then; will you hear such truths as these without profiting by them? Can you possibly leave the church without coming to some such reflections and resolutions as these following:

'I see plainly that human nature is the same, and extremely corrupt in all men; that without the grace of God we can do no good thing. That if by my sins I should grieve the Spirit of God, and force him to leave me to myself, I cannot foresee what I shall do; what I shall be; what doom I shall bring upon myself. I am convinced that if I desire to avoid the greater sins, I must resolve to resist the very beginnings of sin, the very least thing that I believe will displease God; and that if I do not do so and get once out of God's way, one sin will infallibly lead to another. I see what blindness, what wickedness, sinners have been capable of, when once they have been left to themselves; that they could neither think, nor act, nor live, like men that had reason. I will endeavour, (will every serious christian say,) I will live in the fear of God, that I may never consent to known iniquity. This is the only security against the greatest crimes; to be afraid of those judgments which God has threatened to sinners, and of those ways which he has assured us will be our ruin. I will not, therefore, go against my conscience in the least thing whatever, being thoroughly convinced that I cannot take up when I please. I see the danger of continuing in any known sin; if therefore I shall be so unhappy as to fall into sin, I will follow the example of holy David: *I made haste, said he, and delayed not to keep thy commandments.* And I will walk humbly before God, knowing that I have nothing of my own to boast of; neither my own reason, nor my own strength, nor my best resolutions, will secure me from falling into sin, without the help of God.

'I have the comfort of knowing, that while I fear to offend, and sincerely desire to please God, I shall be under the protection of his good providence; he will give his holy angels charge concerning me; he will inspire me with a dread of such things as would hurt me; support me under temptations; correct me when I am going wrong; awaken my conscience; lay restraints

upon my passions; and keep me from such sins as are the ruin of those that forget God.

'In short, the wrath of God is in the gospel of Christ so plainly revealed against all that live wickedly, that all such as do so will (to make their minds easy) either repent and forsake their sins, or strive to blot the knowledge of God out of their minds and turn infidels. For fear, therefore, of falling into that most dreadful judgment, I will resolve, by the grace of God, not to live in any known sin, lest in time I become an atheist.'

These are the resolutions, or some such as these, that you should make when you hear a sermon concerning the deceitfulness of sin, and the steps sinners take to their ruin.

Christians must never hope to escape falling into sins of every kind, who do not seriously attend to what God has made known to us concerning the nature of temptations and trials, and the way not to be hurt by them.

They are charged, as they value their souls, to watch against temptations, and to pray continually, that they may not fall into or be overcome by them. They are assured, by the spirit of God, that the devil is perpetually seeking whom he may devour, finding them off their guard, and from under God's protection. They are put in mind of their own frailty, that they may look up to God perpetually, and depend upon his grace. They are over and over again told, that there is no condition of life but what is subject to temptations; that every man living has reason to be upon his guard against the wiles of the devil, since he had power to prevail with Judas to betray the Son of God himself, with the chief of God's priests to accuse him most wrongfully, and with Pilate to condemn him against his conscience. They have the example of our first parents to convince them how weak they are, and what will be the effects of giving way to the suggestions of the devil. They see every day christians who have vowed to renounce the devil, the world, and the lusts of the flesh, as much led by them as the very heathens.

These things, one should hope, might awaken christians, and make them flee from the wrath to come; but, God

knows, it is too often that they are never minded.

Christians hear them with indifference; they leave the church, and *Satan cometh immediately, and taketh the word out of their hearts, lest they should believe and be saved.* They meet with temptations at every turn, and are drawn away either by their lusts, or by evil examples, and are in the direct way of ruin.

Why now, what do people come to church for but to be put in mind of these things, that they may lay them up in their hearts, and that they may in good earnest pray to be delivered from evil?

Let us beseech you therefore, good christians, when you hear such truths as these, ponder them in your hearts, and come to some resolutions about them.

Say to yourselves, 'I have this day been told, (what I hope I shall not forget,) that I have a watchful enemy to deal with; that I have a very corrupt heart, too ready to yield to his suggestions; and that I have bad examples, too many, to lead me astray, and to my ruin. I dare not therefore presume upon my own strength, upon my own wisdom or conduct; but my whole trust shall be in God. I will most earnestly beg of him not to leave me to my own choices, but to discover to me the dangers I am liable to, and that he will enable me to resist and overcome them. I have been assured that God's grace is sufficient, and therefore I will neither despair nor be dejected. I will never run into the temptations which, in my daily prayers, I pray God I may not be led into. I will remember the word of God; *let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall.* Neither will I hearken unto the suggestions of the devil, but resist him, (as I am exhorted by the apostle,) and then I am assured that he cannot get an advantage over me. I will consider who it is that puts me upon forbidden things; that it is the same Satan who said to our Saviour, *all these things will I give thee*; that it is the same evil spirit, or his angels, who suggests to me that pleasure will not hurt you, that revenge is sweet, that gain, those riches, will make you happy.'

It is the same spirit that would make you believe that there is no hurt in an idle useless life; that there is no harm

in spending your estate or your time; that they are your own, and you may do what you please with them. It is the same Satan that tempts you to neglect the worship of God, and to think it a burden; that persuades you to believe that you have time enough to repent in, and to lead a new life; and that in the mean time you may follow the desires of your heart.

Lastly, It is the same evil spirit, who, when you purpose to lead a new life and forget your good purposes; it is the same spirit that takes with him seven other spirits more wicked than himself, in order to make your condition more desperate.

You will consider therefore, what you lose by not attending to and profiting by God's word; by not pondering it in your heart; and by not resolving to be governed by it; that is, you are like to lose your soul.

God deliver us from all such negligence and blindness; and give us grace to hear and attend to, and remember and profit by his holy word; through Jesus Christ our Lord,

SERMON XLIII.

The same Subject continued.

LUKE, viii. 18.

Take heed how ye hear: for whosoever hath, to him shall be given; and whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken even that which he seemeth to have*.

I HAVE already considered these words, and this warning of our Lord; as also the great hazard christians run who live under the ordinances of the gospel, and do not profit by them.

If it be a great misfortune not to know the gospel, (as most sure it is,) it is a much greater to hear and to know the truths of the gospel, and not to mind them. It was this great sin with which the prophet Ezekiel charged the people of Israel: *This people have eyes to see, and see not; they have ears to hear, and hear not.* And it

* See Ezek. xii. 2. Hof. viii. 12. Matth. xiii. 14. Luke, vi. 47. John, xii. 48. Acts, iij. 23. James, i. 21, 22.

was the same crime with which our Saviour so often charged the Jews, their pollterity; and which was at last the cause of their destruction: *Hearing, ye hear, and will not understand.*

And to such as *bad ears to hear*, that is, the ears of the heart, he gave the charge set down in the text, *Take heed how ye hear*; for according to the measure of your attention, and your sincere desire to profit by what you hear, will be the measure of the grace and knowledge which God will give you.

Pursuant to this strict charge of our Lord and Saviour, I shall continue to shew you the true way of profiting by what you hear, of profiting by sermons. And be assured of it, christians, that your salvation in a great measure depends upon your doing so. *Blessed are they*, saith our Lord, *that hear the word of God, and keep it.* (Luke, xi. 28.) And he assures us in another place (Luke, x. 14), that the not profiting by the word of God will be punished more severely than the greatest crimes.

I shall use no more words to persuade you, now, and at all times, carefully to mind what you hear from God's word, and from his ministers: but I shall proceed (as I have done before) to shew you how you may profit by some of the most important subjects which you will hear very often pressed upon you.

For instance: there are no subjects which christians are more concerned to understand and lay to heart, than those which are called the four last things; namely, death, judgment, heaven, and hell. Death is not to be avoided, the time uncertain; the judgment which must follow will be without appeal; and the sentence will send us either to heaven or hell.

Will you, good christians, hear these subjects at any time explained, and pressed upon you, without laying them to heart? God forbid. Every man that wishes well to his own soul, will (when he hears these things) argue and resolve with himself after some such way as this:

'I have this day been put in mind of some truths, which I have not considered so well as I should have done, that the sentence of death is already passed upon me, and that God only knows when that sentence will be put in execution. That whenever it is put in execution, the

moment I die my fate is determined for ever. That I must not say when I die there will be an end of me; so far from that, that then will begin my happiness or misery. And lastly, that God may be provoked to shorten my days, when he sees that I am like to make no good use of them: it was so done by the unfruitful tree: *Cut it down; why cumbereth it the ground?* How very serious should this make me, and all that hear and believe these things!

'For my own part,' (will every serious christian say to himself,) 'I will, by the grace of God, be no longer deaf to this call, nor flatter myself that my time, my repentance, my salvation, will be always in my own power. I will consider, as I have been exhorted to do, what I was sent into the world for; that I am upon my trial; and that as I behave myself well or ill here, I shall be happy or miserable when I die. That if my corrupt nature be not changed for the better before I leave this world, I must never hope to go to heaven. I will not forget what I have been put in mind of; what a dreadful thing it will be, if I should be surprised by death while I am leading a careless, a useless, or a sinful life; before I have done any good in my generation; and when I have nothing to look back on but what must render me altogether unworthy of mercy.'

'That this may not be my sad case when I come to die, I will no longer defer making my peace with God by a speedy repentance, lest my case grow every day more desperate, as most surely it will; and that I may have time to bring forth fruits meet for repentance, the only sure sign that my repentance was sincere!

'In the next place, that I may not be distracted with the cares of this world, when my thoughts should be upon another, I will settle my worldly concerns while I am in health, and after such a manner as no curse may cleave to any thing I shall leave behind me. In the mean time I will endeavour to mortify all my evil and corrupt affections, and to wean my heart from the love of a world which I must leave so very soon. I will strive to live in peace with all the world, and every night lie down to sleep with the same charitable dispositions

‘ dispositions with which I desire and hope
 ‘ to die. I will endeavour to secure an
 ‘ interest in the mercy of God at the hour
 ‘ of death, by acts of justice, mercy, and
 ‘ charity, while I live. I will, as I have
 ‘ been exhorted to do, endeavour always
 ‘ to be found in the way of my duty,
 ‘ that when my Lord comes he may find
 ‘ me so doing, and that I may hear those
 ‘ comfortable words; *Well done, good and
 ‘ faithful servant!* I will endeavour in
 ‘ the mean time, to be pleased with all
 ‘ God’s choices, that when sickness and
 ‘ death approach, it may be no new thing
 ‘ to me to submit my will to the will of
 ‘ God. I will consider sickness, and all
 ‘ those afflictions which lead to death, as
 ‘ ordered by a gracious God and Father:
 ‘ and that they must be the effect of his
 ‘ mercy, who cannot take delight in the
 ‘ miseries of his creatures; and who could
 ‘ take us out of the world without the
 ‘ least notice, were it for his glory and
 ‘ for our good.

‘ Lastly, I will (as I have been taught)
 ‘ consider death as a righteous sentence
 ‘ of God passed upon all men for sin, and
 ‘ which he will graciously accept as a
 ‘ sacrifice, in union with that of Jesus
 ‘ Christ, for all the sins which we have
 ‘ truly repented of.

‘ Such a preparation for death as this,
 ‘ I am convinced, will free me from the
 ‘ fear of death, and from all other fears
 ‘ which are worse than death.

‘ *The sting of death is sin;* it is this
 ‘ which makes death frightful. If I can
 ‘ have any reasonable assurance that my
 ‘ sins will be forgiven, my death will then
 ‘ be a passage only to a much better
 ‘ world; and, if it has not been my own
 ‘ fault, I may say with St. Paul, *to me
 ‘ to die is gain.*

These are the truths which every christian
 should remember; these the resolu-
 tions he should make, whenever he hears
 a discourse of death, in order to the mak-
 ing his peace with God; that his death
 may be a blessing to him, and that he
 may find mercy at the great day of judg-
 ment.

That is another article of a christian
 man’s faith, which you will often hear re-
 commended to you from the pulpit, and
 from the word of God, as a subject of the
 greatest concern to you.

For the love therefore that you have
 for your own souls, do not read or hear of

the day of judgment without resolving to
 profit by it. Let every man think and
 argue, and resolve thus with himself:

‘ If the bitterness of death were over
 ‘ when our heads are laid in the grave,
 ‘ it would then be no great matter how
 ‘ we live, or how we die; but when God
 ‘ has expressly told us (Acts, xvii. 31.),
 ‘ that he has appointed a day in the which
 ‘ *he will judge the world in righteousness;*
 ‘ and that he has given the world notice
 ‘ and assurance of this, by his raising of
 ‘ his Son Jesus Christ from the dead; this
 ‘ makes it a matter of concern, indeed,
 ‘ how we spend our lives. *He will judge
 ‘ the world in righteousness;* that is, *He
 ‘ will render to every man according to his
 ‘ works done in the body, whether they have
 ‘ been good or evil.*

‘ How often,’ (ought every christian to
 say with concern,) ‘ how often have I
 ‘ heard this without thinking how to pre-
 ‘ pare for that great day, and the account
 ‘ I am then to make! I see what great
 ‘ reason the church had to put that prayer
 ‘ into my mouth, “In the hour of death,
 ‘ and in the day of judgment, good Lord,
 ‘ deliver me.” And I see too what reason
 ‘ I have never to repeat that prayer but
 ‘ with the greatest zeal and devotion, that
 ‘ I may find mercy at that day. But
 ‘ then (as I hope for mercy at that day)
 ‘ I must think of it, and prepare for it;
 ‘ and order my life according to that law
 ‘ by which I am then to be judged, ac-
 ‘ quitted, or condemned. In order to
 ‘ this, I see I must (as I have been ex-
 ‘ horted to do) not suffer myself to lose
 ‘ the sight of that great day, either by
 ‘ business, pleasures, or diversions; but
 ‘ my great concern must be, (will every
 ‘ serious christian say to himself,) my
 ‘ care must be, to govern my life and
 ‘ actions with an eye to the account I must
 ‘ then give, and the judgment that must
 ‘ follow. My care must now be to judge
 ‘ myself, that I may not be condemned
 ‘ of the Lord. And the way I have been
 ‘ directed is this; never to stifle or silence
 ‘ my conscience, but let it pass a righteous
 ‘ sentence upon every thing I do or un-
 ‘ dertake; and to ask myself upon every
 ‘ occasion, some such questions as these:

‘ What account shall I give to my
 ‘ great Judge for this idle useless life I
 ‘ now lead? What account can I give
 ‘ for the estate his providence has put
 ‘ into my hands? What use have I made

‘ of

‘of the talents he has intrusted me with;
 ‘of the authority he has given me, in
 ‘order to promote his honour and the
 ‘good of my fellow-creatures; of the
 ‘riches he has given me, that I may be
 ‘able to relieve the necessities of such as
 ‘are in want; of the knowledge he has
 ‘vouchsafed me, that I may be able to
 ‘instruct the ignorant? All these I must
 ‘then account for as sure as I now live;
 ‘though I am accountable to nobody now,
 ‘and though I think not of the account I
 ‘am to give. Will not this forbidden
 ‘pleasure, this unrighteous gain, which
 ‘I have set my heart upon, will it not one
 ‘day rise up in judgment against me?
 ‘How shall I be able to answer for this
 ‘trouble, this wrong, this hardship, this
 ‘unjust vexation, I am going to give my
 ‘neighbour? I have it in the power of
 ‘my hand to do what I please. Be it so.
 ‘But what advantage will that be to me,
 ‘when I shall have to do with an Almighty
 ‘God, who has declared, *that mighty*
‘men shall be mightily tormentd? I have
 ‘now no fear upon my spirits. Well, but
 ‘remember that a day is coming, when
 ‘the stoutest, the stubbornest heart upon
 ‘earth will tremble.

‘What folly, what madness, must it
 ‘be to provoke him, by my ungodly deeds,
 ‘who is to be my Judge, to acquit or
 ‘condemn me!’

Let that man, who does now blaspheme
 the name of the great God, but think
 with himself, how shall I stand before him
 in judgment. ‘I will bring you off, I
 ‘will gain your cause,’ saith a skilful
 lawyer: but can you bring me off, if my
 cause be unjust, when I shall stand before
 the great Judge of the world?

A man may say to himself, This is a
 poor, ignorant, friendless person I have to
 deal with; I can deal with him as I please.
 But hold a little, and consider: can you
 deal as you please with him who has declared
 himself to be *the helper of the friendless; the*
avenger of the fatherless and the widow?

Well, says another thoughtless man to
 himself, nobody knows, nor shall know,
 this that I am going about. Alas! you
 conclude too hastily; does not he know it,
to whose eyes all things are naked and open,
 and who has declared, *that he will bring*
every the most secret thing into judgment.

Why, (will every thoughtful christian
 argue with himself,) why should I spend
 my whole life in that which will not profit

me in the day of judgment? It will not
 then be asked, whether I was rich or poor,
 but how I bore my poor condition, or
 what use I made of my riches? We are
 told by our Judge himself, what questions
 will be asked at that day. And will it not
 be the highest wisdom for every man to
 ask himself those questions now, that he
 may know what answers to make?

For instance: Let me ask myself, have
 I been merciful to poor and needy people,
 and to such as were destitute of help and
 comfort? If you have not, it concerns you,
 above all things, to consider how you will
 be able to bear that doom which will then
 be passed by your Judge: *Go, ye cursed,*
into everlasting fire: for I was an hungered,
and ye gave me no meat; naked, and ye
clothed me not. (Matth. xxv. 41, 42.)

And if this is to be the sad sentence
 which shall be passed upon the hard-hearted
 and uncharitable at the great day, what
 must the oppressor expect? What have
 they to fear, who waste their estates in
 riotous living, in pride and vanity, while so
 many are in want even of the necessities of
 life? What will they have to say for them-
 selves, who have done nothing towards
 their salvation? Why, they will be in the
 sad condition of that man, *who had not on*
him a wedding garment (Matth. xxii. 11.);
 they will stand speechless; their sin and
 their conscience will stop their mouth.

Such as these will be, or ought to be,
 the meditations of every serious christian,
 when he hears a discourse concerning a
 future judgment, or when he hears that
 great day mentioned in scripture.

The consequence of that judgment is
 another of those subjects which christians
 should never forget. It is not I, but your
 Lord and Judge, who tells you what will
 follow the judgment of the great day:
 (John, v. 28, 29.) *The hour is coming, in*
the which all that are in the graves shall
hear his voice, and come forth; they that
have done good, unto the resurrection of life;
and they that have done evil, unto the re-
surrection of damnation.

You hear, good christians, how nearly
 we are all concerned in this revelation of
 the different portions of good and bad
 men in the next world. My purpose is to
 shew you the true way of profiting by
 what you shall at any time hear upon these
 subjects.

For example: When you hear the de-
 scription of hell, and the fearful punish-
 ment

ment of impenitent sinners, that *they will be sent to a place of torment* (Luke, xvi. 28); that *they must suffer the vengeance of eternal fire* (Jude, 7.); that *their worm never dieth* (Mark, ix. 44.); that *they are to be tormented for ever and ever; and that they shall seek death, but shall not find it* (Rev. xx. 10.): when you hear these amazing truths, do not strive to forget them; do not go about to question them, for they are the declarations of God himself; and they are revealed to us as the strongest motives to repentance and an holy life, *and that we may never come into that place of torment.* They are designed to restrain sinners from ruining themselves, and will be found true, whether they believe, whether they think of them, whether they fear them, or not. *Woe unto you that laugh now, says our Lord, (that is, that strive to divert the thoughts of the wrath to come,) for ye shall mourn and weep.*

‘I will therefore,’ (will every christian of sense and sobriety say,) ‘I will abhor and avoid, as I would the devil himself, the company and conversation of those reprobate men, who make a jest of sin, of hell, and of eternal torments. If it be uneasy to me, and I tremble, when I but think of these things, let me consider the most deplorable condition of those lost souls, who now feel those torments, and who would not be persuaded to think of, and to fear them, when it was in their power, through the grace of God, to escape them.’

But then you will remember, that it is not enough to fear, unless your fears have this good effect, to make you fear to offend him, *who can destroy both body and soul in that hell, which you tremble to think of.* And remember, likewise, that we need not take pains to go to that place of torment; our corrupt nature will lead us thither of course, if we do not strive, if we do not take pains, to avoid it.

It is for this reason, and not to fright us without cause, that the Spirit of God has represented the portion of the damned as the greatest of all evils; that men may be prevailed on to *work out their salvation with fear and trembling*; that is, with a concern answerable to the punishment they will escape by so doing.

No christian, who hears and lays this to heart, will flatter himself that God will not be so severe as he has threatened. *The very angels that sinned, we are assured, are*

reserved in everlasting chains of darkness unto the judgment of the great day. And so sure, as well as severe, will the punishment of sinners be, that no less a sacrifice than the life of his own Son could prevail with God to accept of their repentance. So that such as do not repent, have nothing to look for but judgment without mercy, as sure as this word, (the Bible,) and that God, whose word it is, is true.

These truths, good christians, you will often hear pressed upon you by God in his word, and by his ministers in their sermons. Will you not give yourselves leave to think of them after you leave the church? God forbid. I will tell you what you should do, that you may profit by them. We should, every soul of us, reason and resolve thus with himself:

‘I will endeavour to keep in my mind a dread of those fearful punishments, which (I am assured) are to be the portion of those who live without fear of what must come hereafter. I will consider what my religion requires of me, in order to be secure from these threatened evils. And I will also remember who those are, who (as God himself hath declared) shall be condemned to hell, if they do not repent in time.’

They are such as *know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.* These (saith the apostle, 2 Thess. i. 9.) *shall be punished with everlasting destruction.* So that all unbelievers, and all christians that live like unbelievers, *fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, effeminate, abusers of themselves with mankind; all thieves, covetous, drunkards, revilers, and extortioners* (1 Cor. vi.); all these, without a timely and sincere repentance, *are to have their portion with devils.*

A man must be wretchedly careless indeed, who can hear this declaration of God himself, and not think of getting out of the way of perdition. And even the best of men will fear for themselves, when they hear our Saviour declare, *that broad is the way that leadeth to destruction, and many, many there be that are in it.* And all christians, who give themselves liberty to think of these things, will, when they are tempted to sin, ask themselves some such questions as these:

‘What is it I hazard my soul for? For pleasures that I shall soon be sick of; for riches that I shall leave in a very short time; and for a world that will forget me

‘ me as soon as I am gone. What will it
 ‘ profit me, when this pleasure I am so
 ‘ fond of will certainly be bitterness in the
 ‘ end? When this unjust gain will be fol-
 ‘ lowed with the loss of my soul? When this
 ‘ tenderness of myself, which will now not
 ‘ suffer me to mortify my corruptions, will
 ‘ be punished with everlasting burnings?’

These thoughts, good christians, if kept
 in your memory, and pondered in your
 hearts, will help to preserve you from
 ruin, in the midst of a most profligate age,
 an age in which there are people who
 neither fear God, nor what he can do to
 them; who can laugh at damnation, who
 can wish it to themselves and others with-
 out trembling, and who are in the certain
 way to the lake which burneth with fire
 and brimstone, without caring what will
 become of them. These, christians should
 have no fellowship with, as they value
 their own souls, as ever they expect the
 favour of God, as ever they hope for the
 happiness of heaven.

The happiness of heaven is another of
 those motives which our gracious God
 would not let us want, that we may have
 all the encouragement imaginable to fit
 ourselves for that happy state and place.
 A place, as the Spirit of God represents
 it, where there is neither want, nor sorrow,
 nor sickness, nor pain, nor oppression, nor
 afflictions, nor troubles, of any kind. But
 the happiness of that state no mortal can
 comprehend; *eye hath not seen, nor ear
 heard, neither have entered into the heart of
 man, the things which God hath prepared
 for them that love him.* (1 Cor. ii. 9.)

You will not, sure, hear these things with
 indifference, or return home without con-
 sidering, over and over again, the hap-
 piness of heaven, and the way to be secure
 of it when you die.

I will endeavour to help your medita-
 tions upon this subject, and shew you how
 you may and ought to profit by such ser-
 mons. Every christian should reason thus
 with himself: ‘ I have the sure word of
 ‘ God for it, that my condition when I
 ‘ die will be infinitely happy, even beyond
 ‘ what I can imagine, if it is not my own
 ‘ fault. At the same time, God has given
 ‘ me to understand, that before I can be fit
 ‘ for heaven, my nature must be changed;
 ‘ that I must love him with all my heart
 ‘ and soul, and that, for his sake, I must
 ‘ love all mankind, otherwise I cannot be
 ‘ admitted into that blessed society. He

‘ has also shewed me the way how I may
 ‘ attain these holy dispositions, which are
 ‘ so absolutely necessary to fit me for hea-
 ‘ ven. That in order to love him with
 ‘ all my heart, I must believe in him, and
 ‘ give entire credit to every thing which
 ‘ he has made known to us. That I must
 ‘ fear him, fear to do any thing that I
 ‘ believe will displease him. That I must
 ‘ obey him, do what he has commanded,
 ‘ and avoid what he has forbidden. That
 ‘ I must submit to all his choices for me,
 ‘ and endeavour that my heart may always
 ‘ go along with my lips in this petition,
 ‘ *thy will be done.* That I must give him
 ‘ the honour due unto his name; speak of
 ‘ him with reverence; worship him with
 ‘ great devotion; pray to him for what I
 ‘ want; and give him praise and thanks
 ‘ for all his mercies. And lastly, that I
 ‘ must close with the means of grace which
 ‘ he has ordained for my edification, and
 ‘ by which he will give me the earnest of
 ‘ his Holy Spirit. By observing these rules,
 ‘ I shall come to love God with all my
 ‘ heart, and be qualified for that happiness
 ‘ for which he created me.

‘ In order to love my neighbour, which
 ‘ is another qualification for heaven and
 ‘ happiness, I must neither do nor wish
 ‘ any ill to him; I must remember, that
 ‘ *whosoever hateth his brother, is a murderer;*
 ‘ *and that no murderer has any inheritance*
 ‘ *in the kingdom of heaven.* (1 John, iii. 15.)
 ‘ All bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and
 ‘ clamour, and strife, and evil-speaking,
 ‘ and malice, must (as the apostle exhorts,
 ‘ Ephes. iv. 31.) *be put away from such as*
 ‘ *hope for the happiness of heaven.* We
 ‘ must be both just and charitable, *ready*
 ‘ *to give, and glad to distribute.* We must
 ‘ forgive and give, as becomes brethren
 ‘ and the disciples of Jesus Christ. These
 ‘ are the ways by which we are to express,
 ‘ and gain, and increase, that love for our
 ‘ neighbour which must qualify us for
 ‘ heaven.

‘ And in the last place, with regard to
 ‘ my own self, God has made known to
 ‘ me what qualifications are necessary to
 ‘ make me worthy to be partaker of the
 ‘ inheritance with the saints in heaven.
 ‘ That I must be humble, for God hateth
 ‘ and resisteth the proud. I must be chaste,
 ‘ for no unclean person can enter into hea-
 ‘ ven. I must be temperate and sober, lest
 ‘ that day overtake me unawares. That
 ‘ as I hope to follow my Saviour to heaven,
 ‘ I must

'I must deny myself, and take up the cross; I must mortify my affections and lusts; keep under my body, and bring it into subjection; part with any thing, as dear as a right hand or a right eye, rather than do what will offend God, and shut me out of heaven. Lastly, He has commanded me to watch, to walk circumspectly; to keep my heart with all diligence; because I have an adversary, which, like a roaring lion, is continually seeking to ruin me.

'These things I must endeavour to remember, as I love my soul, and as I hope for heaven; and I must order my life accordingly; for so has Christ expressly told us, *Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven.*'

This, my christian brethren, is the way we must take to profit by sermons upon these important subjects. It is thus we must endeavour to affect our minds, that we may remember, that we may never forget these truths, which concern us as much as our souls are worth. This being the only way to be secure of a blessed eternity, to be ever and anon asking ourselves some such short questions as these:

'Why am I afraid of death? Why do I put the thoughts of it far from me? Is it not because I know that I am not prepared to die? Have I considered how miserable I shall be, if death should surprise me either doing evil, or doing nothing, or doing that which was not my duty to do? Is it because I fancy that I have time sufficient before me to prepare for death? But then I forget that a christian life is the only sure preparation for death; and I forget also what Jesus Christ hath declared, *thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee.* (Rev. iii. 3.) Is not this the time in which I am to chuse whether I am to be miserable or happy for ever? And shall I let this time slip out of my hands? Do not I know that I shall come out of the grave just as I go into it, either fit for heaven, or fit for no place but hell? Have not I myself seen many surprised by death, when they least thought of it; and were amazed when they saw that it was too late to bring forth fruits answerable to amendment of life? What if this uncomfortable case should be my own!'

One would ask further, 'What will this life I lead end in? Will my great Judge approve of this way of spending my time, my estate, and the other talents he has entrusted me with? Can I hope to hear him say, *Well done, good and faithful servant, enter thou into the joy of thy Lord?* Or will not the manner of my life oblige him to say, *Thou wicked servant, thou hast done nothing that I commanded thee?* What is it I am losing my inheritance in heaven for? For some poor pleasure; for some pitiful gain; or to gratify some filthy lust. Can I imagine, that the glorious inheritance of the children of God must cost me no pains, no trouble, to attain it, when it cost my Saviour his life to purchase it for me?

'Lastly, Let me ask myself that question, which my Saviour has put into my mouth, *what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?* What pains ought I not to take, rather than run the hazard of suffering the bitter pains of eternal death?'

Let these things, christians, enter deep into your hearts; do not forget them as soon as you leave the church; beg of God to give you grace to profit by them. And be assured of this, that there is no greater happiness in this life, than to have reasonable hopes of a blessed eternity; which God grant we may all have, and that we may meet in peace in the paradise of God, for the Lord Jesus' sake.

SERMON XLIV.

The same Subject continued.

LUKE, xi. 28.

Blessed are they that hear the word of God, and keep it *.

YOU have here the word of Christ for this important truth, that the preaching of the gospel, the hearing it with attention and zeal, and leading a life answerable thereto, is a sure way to blessedness or happiness.

You know the doom of those who heard the sermons of Christ, and would not mind them: *It shall,* (saith our Saviour and

* See Levit. vi. 2. xxv. 14. Prov. iii. 9. xiv. 33. xviii. 3. xix. 17. xxii. 16. xxviii. 20. Psal. xvii. 14. xxxvii. 2. Isaiah, iii. 15. Zech. vii. 10. Matth. vi. 19. 25. Luke, iii. 14. xvi. 9. xix. 8. 1 Cor. vi. 10. Eph. iv. 28. v. 5. Col. iii. 25. 1 Thess. iv. 6. 1 Tim. iv. 6. vi. 9, 10. 17. Heb. xiii. 5. 1 Pet. v. 7. 1 John, ii. 15.

Judge,)

Judge,) *it shall be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment, than for that people.* By which you see, christians, the great hazard you will run, if you live under the light and ordinances of the gospel, and are not bettered by them.

Our Saviour himself tells you, who it is that tempts you to hear the word with indifference, and to forget what you hear; to despise the preacher and the ordinances of God. He tells you, that it is the devil that taketh the word out of the hearts of those that are not careful to keep it, lest they should believe and be saved.

Lastly, You may be assured of it, that the word preached will become the word of salvation to every one that believeth; to every one who comes to hear with a teachable temper of mind, with a serious purpose and desire to learn his duty, and with a resolution to practise what he hears.

My design in this discourse (as it has been in several others) is, to shew you how you may best profit by the sermons you hear; that you may return from the house of God with benefit and with a blessing.

In order to this, I will propose to you several subjects of importance, and shew you how every christian should apply what he hears to himself.

But in the first place, as ever you hope to profit by what you read or hear, endeavour to discharge your heart of a too great fondness for the world and its idols.

It is not I, but our Lord himself assures you, that let the seed be never so good, yet if it be sown among thorns, they will choak it at last; that is, as he himself explains it (Matt. xiii. 22.), *the cares of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the lusts of other things, will choak the word, and it will become unfruitful.*

I. A too great fondness, therefore, for the things of this world, (or what we call covetousness,) being the greatest hindrance to piety and christian knowledge; we will first consider this evil, and the great mischiefs that attend it.

Take heed, saith our Saviour (Luke, xii. 15.), *and beware of covetousness.* Can we imagine that he would have given christians this double, this earnest caution, but that he knew that there is something

in this sin very destructive; and you will be convinced there is, if you will attend to what follows:

First, That no man can possibly love God whose heart is set upon the world, let him pretend what he will. *If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him.* So saith the Spirit of God. (1 John, ii. 15.)

Secondly, It leads men insensibly into atheism; that is, to depend more upon themselves, and upon their own industry and wealth, than upon God, his providence, and blessing.

Thirdly, It strangely tempts men to believe that any thing almost is lawful, which will but increase their substance.

Fourthly, It most surprisngly changeth the hearts and dispositions of men. A compassionate man, once possessed with a spirit of covetousness, becomes hard-hearted; a liberal temper becomes stingy; and he that was charitable before, now grudges every penny he parts with.

It is branded in scripture with the name of idolatry, because it tempts men to have such an esteem for wealth, as if their life and happiness depended upon having a great deal.

And that which still makes this sin more hateful to God is this, that it is (what the Spirit of God calls it) *the root of all evil* (1 Tim. vi. 10.); the root of every evil, of injustice, of oppression, of extortion, of cheating one another, of thieving, of contention, of law-suits, of wishing for the death of parents, &c.

In short, it is a damnable sin; and whoever lives in it is in a state of perdition: and it has this sad circumstance attending it, that few can be persuaded that they are guilty of it, and therefore cannot be persuaded to repent of it. And yet, no doubt of it, a sin branded in scripture with being *the root of all evil*, must of necessity be known by such as are guilty of it, if it is not their own fault, that they may be left without excuse.

Any man, for instance, may conclude for certain, that he is under the power of this evil spirit, when he is more intent upon the world than in taking care of his soul; when his love of gain puts him upon suspicious ways and means of increasing his substance, or denying his neighbour his rights. Suspicious, I mean to himself; for even that ought to hinder
a good

a good man from doing any thing which he does but fear may displease God, or injure another.

To proceed, That person is possessed with a spirit of covetousness, who has such an opinion and esteem for wealth, as if it could make him happy. Such a man, saith the prophet (Hab. ii. 9.), *coveteth an evil covetousness to his house, that he may set his nest on high, and be delivered from the power of evil*; that is, that he may depend upon himself, be out of the reach of misfortunes, and be independent upon God's providence.

Thirdly, A man may know whether his care and concern for the world does not often make him omit the duties he owes to God and to himself, or perform them with indifference and distraction; when the time is even grudged in which they are performed; when the Lord's day is profaned by unnecessary worldly business, and such business made use of as a pretence for neglecting family duties. When a man shews no gratitude to God for the favours he has bestowed upon him, by doing a proportionable good with them; and when his concern for himself makes him unconcerned for those that want his help. When a man's mind is distracted with imaginary fears of wanting; or who makes his necessities greater than indeed they are, and therefore can never be satisfied with his present condition. Lastly, When every disappointment, every loss or misfortune, casts him into trouble, grief, or despair, not being permitted to consider that it is from God, who orders all things for the best.

These are all instances of that covetousness which the scripture condemns as leading to perdition. And whoever is, or is in danger of being possessed with this spirit, (for that such are possessed with an evil spirit, one need no more question, than that Judas was possessed with such a spirit when Satan entered into him,) whoever is in this sad circumstance, had need to get out of the snare of the devil as soon as possible.

We should now proceed to consider how this is to be done; but it will be necessary to take notice, first, of what is but too often made use of as a cloak for this sin.

The apostle saith, *He that provideth not for his own, and especially for those of his*

own house, or kindred, hath forfeited the faith, and is worse than an infidel. (1 Tim. v. 8.)

People are apt to think that this will justify them, let them be never so worldly-minded. When in truth, (and they will find it is so, if they will but look into their bible,) the apostle is not directing christians to provide estates for their children, but to take care of their poor relations, and not let others be burthened with them.

We come now to consider, what use a serious christian should make upon hearing the nature, the deceitfulness, the danger, and the end of this sin. Now a christian who desires to profit by what he hears will think thus with himself:

'I have heard what the Spirit of God saith; that *every covetous man, who is an idolater, hath no inheritance in the kingdom of God.* (Eph. v. 5.) And shall not so terrible a truth put a stop to an over-greedy desire of getting more than I really want? I see what my duty is. It is to labour in my proper business, depending upon God's blessing, without disquieting myself with unreasonable fears of wanting. And this I am to do; first, in order to supply my own and the necessities of those that belong to me; and then to supply the necessities of those that are in want. I will not let the hurry of business, therefore, (will every serious christian say,) I will not let worldly business hinder me from serving God, because I serve myself most when I serve him. I will endeavour always to remember that I am in the hands of God, who has commanded us to *cast all our care upon him, for he careth for us* (1 Pet. v. 7.); and who having given us life, even before we could ask it, will never let us want the necessary means of preserving it. I will beg of God, that he will grant me grace to make a good use of what he shall give me, which will be a sure way of obtaining more favours from him.

'And since the Spirit of God assures me, that when I do good to others I do most good to myself, I will therefore endeavour to make myself friends against the great day, *by giving alms of such things as I have*, as our Lord commands us. (Luke, ii. 41.) And because I cannot have a better rule than that

which

‘ which the apostle has given us (1 Cor. xvi. 2.), (will every serious christian say who lives by gain) *I will constantly lay by me in store as God hath prospered me, that I may have to give to him that needeth: and that I may do this more cheerfully, I will beg of God to preserve me from an evil spirit of covetousness; and that I may lay up in store a good foundation against the time to come.*

‘ In order to this, I will often call to mind such scriptures as these: *that wealth profiteth not in the day of wrath; either when we fall into affliction, or when we come to die. Thou fool, this night shall thy soul be required of thee: then whose shall those things be which thou hast provided?* (Luke, xii. 20.) So (saith our Lord) *is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich towards God; that is, employing his riches to God’s glory, or transmitting them to heaven by the hands of the poor. Remember (saith Abraham to the rich man) that thou in thy life time receivest thy good things, the things in which thou didst place thy very soul and happiness; and likewise Lazarus, evil things; but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented.*’ (Luke, xvi. 25.)

Will any christian after this call those his good things, which may be lost when he least thinks of it; that he cannot keep without fear, nor part with without vexation; which tempt us to forget God, are a snare to us while we live, and may, without a mighty grace, be a curse to us when we are dead? Rather let us all beg of God to convince us most effectually of the vanity of all the idols of this world, which we are but too apt to doat on, and that we may not, like unbelievers, look for happiness here; and especially that God would keep us from every degree of a sin which is the mother of so many evils.

What those evils are we now come to take a short view of; that, as we value our souls, we may abhor and avoid them.

II. The first we shall consider is that of oppression. When a man bears hard upon his neighbour, because it is in the power of his hand to do it; or when it is not in the power of his neighbour to contend with him: or, secondly, when a man’s necessities force him to submit to the very hardest terms his neighbour

thinks fit to impose upon him: or, thirdly, when a man will take all the advantage of a hard bargain which the law will give him, though it be to the great loss of his neighbour.

These, and such as these, are very great crimes, and will shut men out of heaven, though no law on earth can take hold of those that are guilty of them. And indeed, nobody thinks them small crimes when they themselves come to be the sufferers.

Hear what the Spirit saith of these sins: *He that oppresseth the poor to increase his riches, shall surely come to want.* (Prov. xxii. 16. 23.) *Oppress not the poor* (Zech. vii. 10.); that is, those that are not able to contend with you; *the Lord will plead their cause, and spoil the soul of those that spoiled them.* But above all, hear these terrible words of God: *Oppressors, extortioners, shall not inherit the kingdom of God;* and then you know what they must inherit.

III. Injustice is another sin to which a spirit of covetousness leads men. I shall not take notice of those instances of injustice which the laws of men may and ought to punish, and do the sufferers right, without making it cost them more than it is worth.

There are other instances of injustice, as evil in the sight of God and as damnable in the end, though people make a shift to live in them without public reproach or check of conscience; such are, taking advantage of men’s mistakes, ignorance, simplicity, and the like.

I will put you in mind of instances of this kind, that you may avoid the sin and the punishment.

If a man is in drink, he is, in the very language of the world, over-seen. Now, if in such a condition he happen to fall into bad hands, and make a bargain, it is ten to one but he repents when he is sober, and too often his family smart for it. Shall I go about to prove that it is a sin to insist upon such a bargain? Every man who has a conscience knows it to be so; but perhaps every body does not remember what God has expressly declared (1 Thess. iv. 6.), *that he will be the avenger of all such as go beyond or defraud another in any matter.*

How easily may a poor man who has a righteous cause mistake, or be unable to defend it: but will his oversight or inability

ability give me or you a right to that, to which in truth we had no just title; or will the judgment of a court lessen the injustice when it comes to be tried at the great day?

To feed a man with money when I know he has no real occasion, only that I may get a bargain of his estate when he shall be forced to sell it, this is thought to be no great crime; and yet it is plain I help to ruin him, and perhaps his family; and if he sins in squandering the inheritance of his forefathers, is it possible for me to be without guilt?

Because in wronging orphans and widows and poor people, a man has less powerful people to deal with, is he therefore less wicked? No sure; so far from it, that God has declared himself concerned in such causes: *Their Redeemer, saith Solomon (Prov. xxiii. 11.), is mighty; he shall plead their cause with thee.*

How often do wills and writings of moment, and even other things of value, fall into the hands of persons to whom they do not belong! The sin of concealing such things is looked upon as a less sin than stealing, for no reason I am sure, but because in one case he may be in danger of being hanged if he is caught; and in the other, he will only be called a dishonest man, which such a man will not lay much to heart. But christians should consider, that the judgment of a righteous God will not be according to the foolish opinion of men.

It is too common for people to conceal and keep what they have found. Such people do not sure know that there is an express law of God (Levit. vi.) against such practices; nor do they ever think how they shall answer it at the great day of accounts.

If a man will take all advantages which the law will give him, he will very often do great injustice in the sight of God, and make himself liable to restitution, without which his repentance and salvation will be very hazardous. And indeed a man must love the world exceeding well, even better than his own soul, who will put his neighbour to trouble, grief, and expence, to seek for his rights in equity, when he knows beforehand that in equity he will and ought to be relieved.

But the sins of fraud and injustice, which are most common and least taken notice of, are such as are committed in the way

of trade and bargains. The wise man has given all people fair warning of this (Ecclus. xxvii. 2.): *As a nail sticketh fast between the joinings of the stones, so doth sin stick close between buying and selling.* Every christian theretore who desires to keep a good conscience, will be glad to have such rules to walk by, as he needs not be deceived, unless he be willing to be deceived. Such is that of our Saviour's (Matth. vii. 12.): *Whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them; for this is the law and the prophets.* Which, though a general rule, may by a well-meaning christian be applied to all our dealings one with another; while those that are resolved to be rich, whatever shall be the consequence, all the rules of the gospel, though never so well explained, will be of little use to them. But for such as do really make a conscience of their ways, one would endeavour to make their way plain and safe.

Now, gain being the great and just end of trade, of which every man for himself must be judge, and consequently too apt to be favourable to his own interest, I shall therefore recommend one very plain rule, which will go a great way towards directing every conscientious man of business, how to act safely with regard to gain; and this is, to take such a gain, advantage, or consideration, as the person with whom I deal would be satisfied with, if he knew my business as well as I do myself, and the reasons which oblige me to take such a profit. Whoever makes this his rule, his conscience will never reproach him of injustice. But if, instead of doing so, men will take all that they can get; make a hand of the ignorance, necessities, or simplicity of those with whom they deal; they do what they must know to be unjust, and make themselves liable to one of the most difficult duties of christianity, and that is, restitution, without which their repentance will not be accepted of God.

But before we come to consider this duty of restitution, I would add a few words concerning the now common, but scandalous crimes of pilfering and stealing.

I am very sensible that few of those who have fallen into these base bewitching sins, will mind what can be said from the pulpit or from the word of God. The Spirit of God saith indeed (Zech. v. 4.), that

that a curse or evil spirit entereth into the house of the thief, to consume it with the timber and stones. But what will this signify to those that have neither faith, nor religion, nor shame, nor fear?

But it will not, one would hope, be in vain to advise those who are not yet arrived to this height of sinning, to repent and leave it in time; for be assured of it, that when a spirit of pilfering has once taken possession of a man, it will, if not resisted, lead him to every degree of that sin till it brings him to ruin both of soul and body; and that it will be as difficult for him, whatever his condition in the world afterwards may be, to break off an habit of stealing, as it is for a drunkard, or a whore-matter, or a common swearer, to leave off those vices that are become a second nature to them.

How exceedingly careful, therefore, should parents be to discourage every the least degree of this sin, every shadow of it; to warn their children over and over again, against so base, so scandalous a vice, which is so hard to be forsaken, so hard to be repented of. For restitution must be made for all the sins we have been speaking of, as ever men hope for salvation, at least in the sincere endeavour.

I will no more go about to prove that restitution is a necessary duty, than I would take pains to persuade you that robbing is a sin. Every man's conscience, every man who dare ask his conscience, must tell him so. And if any man is easy under the guilt of this sin, he will be easy under the guilt of any other sin. For sure the same reason and justice which oblige me to restore what I have borrowed, will oblige me to make restitution for what I have wronged a man of. This being a certain truth, that all a man gets wrongfully is theft and robbery, and no better.

Therefore delay not, christians, at the peril of your souls, to make satisfaction for any injustice or wrong you have done, while it is in your power. And if any scruple arises in your breast concerning the way of doing it, go to your pastor, or to some person of judgment and discretion, who may be able to silence your doubts, and quiet your conscience.

Without doing this, a man of any thought can have no comfort either liv-

ing or dying. *This day*, (saith our Saviour, Luke, xix. 8. to Zaccheus,) *this day is salvation come to thy house*. So that until he had sincerely resolved to make restitution, he was not in a state of salvation; he was in a state of perdition.

The law of God to the Israelites (Lev. vi. 2, &c.) is so particular upon this head, that I must repeat it to you: *If a soul sin, and commit a trespass against the Lord, and lie unto his neighbour in that which was delivered him to keep, or in fellowship, or in a thing taken away by violence, or hath deceived his neighbour, or hath found that which was lost, and lieth concerning it; he shall restore it in the principal, and add a fifth part more thereto, and give it unto him to whom it appertaineth. And then the priest shall receive his trespass-offering, and make an atonement for him, and it shall be forgiven him.* And pray take notice, that this command did not concern such as were convicted of these crimes of injustice before a magistrate, but such whose own consciences accused them, and who desired peace and pardon from God.

This was the way prescribed by God himself. This is the voice of the law and the gospel; and, let me add, of natural reason; for every body who has been wronged expects satisfaction; and, if it is denied by men, is apt to appeal to God for justice and vengeance. So that the most ignorant know their duty in this case; and if they are loath to make restitution, it is because the fear of God is not in their hearts. They will venture their souls rather than part with what they have got.

Christians therefore who wish well to themselves, and are convinced of the absolute necessity of this duty, will think beforehand, when they are tempted to any of the sins we have been speaking of; they will think what a bitter cup they are preparing for themselves if they give way to such temptations.

Christians would do well to consider how it was with Judas when his conscience was awake: he valued the thirty pieces of silver no more than the very earth he trod upon; he flung them away; he confessed his injustice before the world; and would have given the world, if he had had it, to have had it in his power to have undone what he had been guilty of. And surely this will be the case of every one,

either now or hereafter, who knows he has done wrong, and will not be persuaded to make timely satisfaction.

On the other hand; a christian who resolves to do his duty in this instance to the best of his power, (for God expects no more,) by doing so, he gives glory to God; he acknowledges the justice of his laws, the power he has to punish offenders, his mercy in accepting the repentance of sinners upon the most equitable conditions; he shews that he fears God, and that he values the favour of God more than his own profit or his own reputation; and has the surest proof and comfort that his repentance is sincere, and his sins forgiven.

I shall conclude this article of restitution with the words of that excellent godly divine, Bishop Beveridge: "All persons that ever wronged any man of any thing, are bound to make restitution. All that by forging, or concealing of deeds, or tampering with witnesses, have got possession of other men's estates. All that by robbing, or any kind of theft, have stolen what was their neighbour's. All servants and apprentices who neglect their master's business, embezzle or purloin his goods. All that by false measures or weights impose upon their customers. All that conceal the faults of the goods they sell. All that cheat or over-reach those they deal with. All that by any wicked artifice defraud their creditors of what is their due. All that by smuggling of goods, forswearing themselves, or bribing of others, withhold from the king any part of his customs or other revenues, which the laws of God and of the land have given him a just right to. In short, all that have been either principals or accessaries in wronging any man of any thing, they are bound to make full restitution." Thus far that good man.

Now every serious christian who hears these things and lays them to heart, will reason and resolve with himself after some such way as this:

"I see plainly that I must not judge of the greatness of the sins of injustice and fraud by the opinion and way of the world, but by the authority of God, who has forbidden them by the punishments he has threatened, and by the mischiefs that attend them. Such sins

being committed without remorse, are too often forgotten; and it is to be feared, are too seldom repented of. I will not therefore let the love of the world possess my soul, lest it choke the seed of God's word sown in my heart, and those truths which should keep me from ruin. Such as these: *He that hasteth to be rich, can hardly be innocent.* (Prov. xxviii. 20.) That all depends upon the blessing of God, which cannot be hoped for in unrighteous ways. That every man living has a right to be dealt with fairly and with justice. That neither life nor happiness consisteth in the abundance any man possesseth. That it will be no advantage to a man to have doubled his talents, if at the same time he has doubled his guilt. That posterity will feel the effects of my injustice; God having declared (Job, xx. 28.), that *he will lay up the iniquities of sinners for their children.* And lastly, that *there is nothing that a man can get in exchange for his soul.*

These considerations I will dwell upon, will every serious christian say, when he has heard them from the pulpit, or from God's word. And may this be the resolution of every soul who has now heard these things and attended to them! In order to this, I will leave a few things with you to be remembered.

Suppose, for example, you should see one of your poor neighbours wronged, or deprived of his just rights or goods, by robbery, by oppression, or by fraud. To see a whole family in trouble; their minds uneasy; their health and rest broken; their necessary business neglected; tempted to murmur against God; and to curse such as have been the occasion of their trouble. Let, I say, any body who has the least spark of humanity, grace, or goodness, see this; and say, whether this will not make him abhor, and resolve against every instance of injustice, violence, and fraud, which must of necessity give his neighbour so much sorrow and grief of heart.

If this does not affect every one that sees or hears of it, (for there may be some people so destitute of humanity and grace, that provided they be easy, and can get or keep what they have gotten, are not much concerned for the sufferings of others,) let us suppose we saw such a man upon his death-bed; his eyes open,

his

his conscience awake, and calling to mind the evil he has done his neighbour, whether by cunning, power, violence, or fraud; dreading the consequence; not knowing how to make satisfaction for the injuries he has done; ashamed to own his crimes, and yet not able to bear the thoughts of them; just going to leave the world under the greatest uncertainties of what is like to be his portion in a very few hours perhaps: Can there be a case, a condition, more terrible, more miserable, than this? And yet how many are there, who in all human appearance leave the world under these most astonishing circumstances?

Lastly: Suppose people should be so thoughtless, so stupid, so ignorant, as to die without remorse, or fear; is their case any better than that of those who die under the fear of God's displeasure? Can it be imagined, that their ignorance or unconcernedness, will alter the decrees of God, who has expressly declared, that they that have done evil, and have not repented, *shall go into everlasting fire*? This should hinder christians from doing to others what they would not have done to themselves.

Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself, with such a love as worketh no ill to his neighbour. Believe it, christians, mine and your salvation depends upon the observation of this command of God.

I pray God we remember it; and pardon us whenever through frailty we are wanting to our duty, for Jesus Christ's sake.

S E R M O N XLV.

By BISHOP HICKMAN.

An early Piety a necessary Duty.

ECCLES. xi. 9.

Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth, and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth, and walk in the ways of thy heart, and in the sight of thine eyes; but know that for all these things God will bring thee into judgment.

IN this book of Ecclesiastes, Solomon calls himself the preacher, thinking it no disparagement to his royal dignity to descend from government to instruct his people. God had blessed him with the

greatest wisdom, and the circumstance of his reign afforded him sufficient experience in the world; so that having observed and tried the several courses of human life, in this book he sums up all his observations, for the honour of God, and the benefit of succeeding ages. Here he has shewn us the true bounds of wisdom and folly, what is either profitable or hurtful to the sons of men; the powerful inclinations which we have to vice, and the more powerful motives to allure us to virtue. Here the ways of God are faithfully related, the nature of man is perfectly described, and the necessary connection between folly and repentance, sin and judgment, is exactly shewn. Here he recounts all the follies of his youth, and the excursions of his riper years; his fond pursuits after pleasure and mirth, women and wine, and all things which vain and inconsiderate men are apt to set their hearts upon; and he sums up all in this short sentence, *vanity of vanity, all is vanity*. Though the words of my text are principally directed to the young, yet they comprehend the whole compass of our lives, and may serve for instruction to every age; they shew us how naturally youth begins in folly and sin, which necessarily leads us to repentance in our riper years, and if continued in, brings us to judgment at our latter end. In the following discourse, I shall consider,

The inclinations of youth, and the vanity of them; which cannot be more elegantly expressed than in the former parts of the text, wherein Solomon artificially exposes the humour of that age, by shewing how it indulges its own fancy, and affects nothing more than a boundless, uninterrupted flow of pleasures. He knew the natural heat and giddiness of youth; how want of experience renders them incapable of advice, and impatient of contradiction or restraint; and who even take a pride in rejecting all prudence and consideration. All this the preacher knew, and therefore did not attempt to stop the young man in his course, by crossing the current of his pleasures; but he allows him the full scope and swing of his lusts, and lets him follow his own inclinations, to see what will be the end. *Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth, and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth, and walk in the ways of thy heart, and the sight of thine eyes.* And

though this at first sight seems very pleasing, yet if we view it nearer, we shall find the passage so full of danger, as rather to discourage a wise man's attempt, than invite his curiosity.

As, first; *Rejoice, O young man.* And what is joy, but folly and want of consideration? It is to give ourselves up to a heedless intemperate life, to discard our reason lest it should reprove our vanity; is acquiring such a habit of mind as not only endangers our souls, but is unsuitable to our nature. The providence of God has dispensed to every man a mixture of good and evil in this world, and every wise man will be contented with that alloy. But if we separate the bitter from the sweet, what shall we do when we come to the bottom of the portion, where the dregs will be all bitterness, and that God besides puts trembling into our cup? A wise heathen observed, that true joy is a serious thing; and a wiser than he said of laughter, that it is madness; and of mirth, what does it? It only deludes us with false appearances of happiness, brings us into a pleasant vale, where is a snake lurking in the grass, which at last proves to be the valley of the shadow of death. Thus our pleasure leads us into a fool's paradise, and there leaves us to lament our loss of it. It seduces us from the paths of virtue and honour, into a smooth way, and then draws a mist before our eyes, that we may not see the precipice to which it leads. It gives a loose to our passions, and banishes that wisdom which is our best guard and defence. *Rejoice, O young man;* but know, that whilst thou investest the tempter into thy bosom, instead of filling thy heart with joy, thou emptyest it of all thy virtue. Again,

Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth: but what is there in youth to occasion such rejoicing? Youth is a time of weakness and inexperience, and is generally so ill managed as to prove a reproach to our age; and is this matter of joy? Is this a proper season to rejoice, when we are sowing the seeds of a long repentance? Is this a time to trust our virtue without a guard, when our reason is weak, and our passions strong? From whence proceeds this confidence, or what can we find in our youth to create in us this assurance? Is want of understanding a happiness, or want of experience a

commendation? How powerful a thing is ignorance in so perverse a thing as man? But as youth is a time of strength and vigour, for then our spirits are active and our humour gay; therefore the young man regards pleasure as his portion, and so resolves to go on, rejoicing in his lot.

And let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth. That is, improve all opportunities of joy and take thy pleasure, for nature is now in its prime, and therefore enjoy the blessings of life while it is fresh and fragrant. It is true, that youth, like the spring, is a time of hopes; and yet it is only the hopes of a joyful harvest; for then is the proper time for joy: but why should we flatter ourselves with the hopes of a glorious harvest, which perhaps we may never reap? Again, youth is a time of strength and vigour. But, alas! how short, how uncertain is that time and strength? How liable is youth to be supplanted by a disease, or untimely death? All this the young man, ignorant as he is, cannot but know. But though his understanding informs him better, yet as prudence and forecast are the things he hates, he will persist to walk in the ways of his heart, whatever happens, and will not depart from the sight of his eyes, for all the good morals in the world; and therefore resolves to allow himself the full scope of his inclinations, and to run desperately on, wheresoever his fancy will lead, or his passions drive him. But is a young man so wise as to be trusted without a guide, when age itself, with all his experience, stands in need of good advice? It is a dangerous thing for the wisest man to lean unto his own understanding; with what confidence then can the young man presume to walk in the ways of his heart, and the sight of his eyes, when his eyes and his heart are so blind and deceitful? And yet tell him of his danger, and he will despise the information, disdain all advice, and pursue his own course, though the ways of his heart, and the folly of his eyes, lead him directly to the chambers of death.

These are the follies and dangers of youth. But if the rashness and ignorance of that age be no excuse for such a weak course of life, how much more inexcusable are they, who continue the same practice in their riper years, and carry their youthful vices with them to the grave? When experience and years have improved our
reason

reason and understanding, and given us a judgment of discretion, what a shame is it that we should deliver ourselves up to the government of our passions and lusts, and, forgetting the gravity of our age, be captivated like children with every trifling pleasure? How can we hear the voice of God, upbraiding our folly and denouncing judgment against us, and not be afraid? *Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth, and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth, and walk in the ways of thy heart and in the sight of thine eyes. But know that for all these things God will bring thee to judgment.* Which leads me to consider the restraint that religion puts upon us, and the great reason we have to comply with the apprehensions of a future judgment.

The consideration of a future judgment is enough to confound our lusts, baffle all our enjoyments, and allay the extravagant follies and heats of youth; for what comfort will he receive from all the rejoicings of his youth, or what profit will it be to him to have walked in the way of his heart, and the sight of his eyes; when that indecent liberty he so unseasonably used, will tend only to make his death, and the sense of his never-dying pains, the more intolerable? How dismal will be the remembrance of his sins, when he shall consider that they brought him into this place of torment, and lost him those pleasures, *which eye hath not seen, nor the heart of man conceived?* When the irreversible decree is once passed upon him, what would he not give to reverse the sentence? What lusts of the flesh, what pleasures of the body, what sin of the soul, would he not give up to redeem himself? Such reflections as these will aggravate our punishment, and increase the torments of hell. This is a worm in our conscience that never dies, that never goes out. A wounded spirit is the most exquisite pain; the wrath of God in judgment is what no mortal can bear: it is such a burden as the young man with all his spirit cannot remove, nor can the old hardy sinner be proof against it. For though we have hardened our hearts like the nether millstone, yet God can soften them again, and by putting fears and terrors into our souls, prepare them for the impressions of his wrath. Consider these things, and then rejoice, O young man, if thou darest, and let thy heart cheer thee if it can; for

to what purpose shouldst thou trust to the sight of thine eyes, or follow the ways of thine heart, when thou knowest that God will shortly bring thee to judgment; and then this heart of thine, which now flatters and betrays thee, will accuse, condemn, and torment thee?

Since then we have just reasons from our sins, to apprehend the dreadfulfulness of this judgment, what remains, but that we in time provide for our security, and immediately begin a wiser course of life? Surely, we will no longer trifle with God's judgments, but offer up to him our darling vices; now while we have some pleasure in them: so lively, so early a sacrifice will be accepted. But to do this when the decays of age shall come, and our pleasure abandon us, is a forced virtue, and deserves no thanks. Let us then, before it be too late, check the intemperance of our lusts, abate our immoderate desire of any pleasure, and possess our souls with more serious reflections. Let us consider that we are the offspring of heaven, of a divine extraction, and sent by God into this world to govern and subdue our sinful appetites. Let us correct the extravagance of our ways, and make God's law our only rule. Let us so rejoice in our youth, that in our riper years, and when old age comes, we may long for that time when God shall bring us into judgment, and then receive our doom with comfort. And that we may the more effectually proceed herein, it may be proper to consider this kind memento of Solomon: *Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them.* And a plain interpretation of these words will lead us to a practical application of what has been said. And,

First, The remembrance of our Creator obliges us to pay him that love and obedience, which is the natural tribute of his mercy. Whatsoever we enjoy is the bountiful gift of his goodness, the product of his creation, and therefore it should remind us of our great Benefactor. The world is a register or catalogue of his noble acts; in the volume of this book we may read in beautiful characters the name of God; and that infinite is his mercy, and wonderful his works. With what admirable order and convenience has he created this world, making it fit for

our entertainment, and every creature therein, to serve for our nourishment, ornament, or defence! so that if we do not forget ourselves, we must needs remember our Creator, and acknowledge his just title to our obedience. And who so deserving to command, as he that created man? Who so proper to give us laws, as he who knows the secrets of our hearts? And therefore, with a ready compliance to his commands, and a resigned submission to his will, we should remember our Creator, and confess, that as it is our happiness to be created, so it is our honour to be commanded by him.

Secondly, We should remember our Creator with fear and reverence. There is so much majesty in the name of Creator, as should strike an awful dread into our hearts, and create a reverence within us; we should fall down and kneel before him when we remember the Lord our maker. No submission can be too low; if we humble ourselves to the dust, it is but from whence he raised us up; and if he has exalted us to a higher station, we should therefore pay him the honour due unto his name. And if God has given us beauty and strength, the vigour of youth, and opportunities of pleasure, let us not in the enjoyment of these good things, forget that God who created both them and us; lest we should provoke his wrath, whose power is mighty to destroy, as well as to create.

Thirdly, When we remember our Creator we should also pay him a religious and holy worship, which is the natural result of his power and mercy, the genuine composition of our love and fear; and what can we his creatures do less, than fall down and worship him for our creation, preservation, and all the blessings of this life? This is what we properly call the service of God, and which all nations in the world have acknowledged to be his due; even a very heathen has observed, "That no nation was ever so barbarous, as to live without religion; or so foolish, as to hope for the goods of the earth, without paying their devotion to the gods in heaven." Thus, we see that an obedient, devout, religious life, is what Solomon advises us to, in these words, *Remember thy Creator*. But though this is a matter of very weighty importance, and of the utmost concern to us, yet our giddy minds are apt to adjourn the consideration of it

till old age, or that some kind affliction has brought us to a better way of thinking. I shall therefore consider the time when this duty is to be performed.

And the wise man's direction is, remember now thy Creator, this very instant, delay not so necessary a duty, since we can call no day our own but the present; and if we do not remember our Creator now, it may be feared we never shall. The time past is already dead, the time to come is yet unborn, but the present is our life, and the living they shall praise God. If a religious life be ever a duty, it is so now, this very moment; and therefore, without the greatest presumption, we cannot defer it till to-morrow. The very first grounds and principles of religion, teach us to worship and serve God all the days of our lives. And God knows the service of every day requires our most serious endeavour, and all that the morrow can do, is to take care of the things of itself. Therefore, remember thy Creator now, and trifle not away the present time, but make every day a pattern of thy whole life; perform thy duty, and make up thy accounts every night, so wilt thou be always ready to appear before God.

But some will say, that perhaps now is an unseasonable time; it may be the prime of our youth, and what need we be so early called to our duty? No, says the preacher, you must remember thy Creator now, in the days of thy youth; to defer it may be too late, therefore obey the first summons: and the more early thou attendest thy duty, the better it will be accepted, and the easier performed. Dedicate unto God the first fruits of thy life, and that will make all thy succeeding years holy and happy; offer up to him devout sacrifices in the spring of thy age, and he will bless thee with many fruitful harvests. This is the most proper time to frame and model our minds according to the will of God; for now our faculties are fresh and vigorous, our wills compliant, and our understandings free from prejudice. At these tender years we shall receive impressions with ease, and by use retain them. But if we suffer our vices to grow into habits, they will soon triumph over our virtue, and sin and death will quickly get dominion over us. It is therefore for our ease, as well as security, to apply ourselves be-
times

times to that work, which by delay gets advantage over us every moment. Therefore let us speedily correct and reform our errors, and turn from all our evil ways, for they lead to the chambers of death.

There are others who think, that as death commonly gives warning before he strikes, by some diseases or natural decays, to admonish us of our approaching end, that it will be then time enough to redeem our time, when the days are evil; directly contrary this to the advice of Solomon, who bids us remember our Creator, before those evil days come. For what commendation is it, to grow virtuous by force, to be frightened into our duty, and never leave our sins till they have forsaken us? What merit is there in a rebel's laying down his arms, when he can hold them no longer? Therefore let us remember our Creator before we are driven to the last extremity; lest our forgetfulness of God should force him to strike us with a sudden destruction, and not give us time to pray that we may die the death of the righteous.

Lastly, The sensual man has yet one more pretence; that as there is a time for all things, therefore old age is the most proper season for such a melancholy mortifying work. Indeed, had we nothing else to do than only to repent, a sick or death-bed might serve our turn; but it is not repentance only, but amendment that is required; not only a death unto sin, but a life unto righteousness; and to this duty we must come with vigour, and cheerfully undertake the work. We must remember our Creator before those years draw nigh, when a man shall say, *I have no pleasure in them.* We must not make our devotion an act of necessity, but of choice. God expects a free-will offering, the prime of our flocks, the richest of our treasures. But if we consume these upon our lusts, and assign him the refuse of our years, we may expect him to send us for our reward, to those Gods whom we have chosen in our prosperity, and let them deliver us out of our distress, if they can.

But it is a great mistake to think, that pleasure is inconsistent with religion, and that there is no difference between a sour and a sober life: nay, it is a great dis-

paragement to God, and a discouragement to all good men, to pretend that there is no piety but in a gloomy soul, and a dejected countenance. In our repentance we mourn, and with just reason; but in the acts of obedience, why reserved and grave? In the exercises of devotion, *why so heavy, O my soul, why so disquieted within me?* Surely, to live always as in a state of penance is no good symptom in any man, no great sign of religion; for it can be no commendation of his piety to be always grieving, but yet never to repent.

True religion was, no doubt, designed to improve our nature, to complete our happiness, and to shew man in his true perfection: to fill us with exalted thoughts, to entertain us with lively notions and generous desires: that we should *serve the Lord with gladness, and come before his presence with a song.* It is not so much the formality of the tribute as the willing mind and the cheerful giver that God respects; but what pleasure can he possibly have in those services of ours, which we ourselves have no pleasure in? If therefore we find ourselves in health and strength, plentiful in our fortunes, and vigorous in our minds, let us not prostitute these noble gifts of God to profane ungodly uses; and think they were given us only to make provision for our flesh, and to fulfil our lusts; and when all is gone, that then it is time enough to return unto God. But when we enjoy our hearts desire, then let us deem it the properest season to pay him our devotion; for when we are most fit for pleasure, then are we fittest for religion; then is our heart a noble sacrifice indeed, and worthy of our Creator; a present fit to be made to the great God of heaven and earth, because with such sacrifices he is well pleased. But if it is unfortunately broken with age, and bruised with iniquity, yet even then it is the best we have to give, and a *bruised broken heart, is a sacrifice that God will not despise.* Therefore, whatever our circumstances are, whether we are in health, or lie under any affliction, calamity, or decay, let us take care to hasten our repentance and redeem the time, because the days are evil.

S E R M O N XLVI.

By SAMUEL CLARKE, D. D.

The Government of Passion.

EPHESIANS, iv. 26.

Be ye angry, and sin not.

SINCE in the ordinary conduct of human life, and in the common affairs of the world, natural wisdom teaches us, that the only sure and effectual means of avoiding great evils, is the preventing of small ones; and that the beginnings of mischief are much more easily prevented, than the progress of them stopped, or the consequences of them remedied:

Since under the improvements of philosophy in the heathen world, the principal and most useful precepts given men for the government of their passions, were to watch continually, and guard themselves against the first emotions of passion rising up in opposition to reason; to stop the first breaking out of a silent stream, which by neglect would swell into an overflowing torrent; to extinguish the first spark of a scarce discernible fire, which by degrees would prevail into a destroying conflagration:

Since by the still purer and more refined precepts of the doctrine of Christ, we are obliged to govern even our very thoughts and desires; to pray against the temptations and first occasions of sin; to lay the axe to the root of the tree, by suppressing all corrupt affections, by restraining all inordinate appetites, by moderating and keeping even a strict hand over innocent inclinations; by plucking out, if need be, even a right eye, and cutting off a right hand:

Since these things, I say, are so, it may well seem strange, to any one that is not versed in the Jewish manner of speaking, how St. Paul should come to express himself after such a sort, as if he intended to indulge men in letting loose the reins to their passions, as far as was consistent with innocency; and thought it safe to permit men to allow themselves in the gratification of their anger, provided they did but just keep themselves without the borders of sin: *Be ye angry, and sin not.* As if the bounds between what is excusable and criminal were marked with so distinct a limit, that men might be trusted to discern with ease, when they were at the utmost

extent of their lawful liberty; or that it could be supposed men had so perfect a command of themselves, as to be able to stop suddenly at an appointed mark in a swift career, and say, when they please, to their passion, hitherto shalt thou go, and no further.

Our Saviour, in his divine sermon upon the Mount, makes it, in almost every instance, his peculiar improvement of moral obligations under the gospel, to warn men against the approaches and tendencies towards those sins, whereof only the gross acts were forbidden under the law. Mat. v. 27. *Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, thou shalt not commit adultery; but I say unto you, that whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her, hath already committed adultery with her in his heart. Ye have heard it has been said by them of old, thou shalt not forswear thyself; but I say unto you, swear not at all. Ye have heard it has been said, an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth; but I say unto you, that ye resist not evil. Ye have heard it has been said, thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy; but I say unto you, love your enemies.* And in the case before us, of wrath and anger: *Ye have heard, says he, that it has been said by them of old time, thou shalt not kill; but I say unto you, that whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause, shall be in danger of the judgment; and whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire.* Nay, in some of the ancientest copies of this gospel, those words of restriction, (*without cause*) whosoever shall be angry *without a cause*, are omitted; and the declaration is made in the most general terms: *Whosoever is angry with his brother, shall be in danger of the judgment:* men being apt enough of themselves, to put in such restrictions as may be equitably presumed; and there being no need, in the body of the law itself, to express such excepted cases or such limitations, to which in all reason and equity, it may, however, be supposed the law cannot extend. This makes it still the more worthy of inquiry, whence it might come to pass, that St. Paul expresses himself upon this subject in such a manner, as may seem to give some indulgence to such degrees of passion as are not directly sinful; *Be ye angry, and sin not;* when yet both by experience and the reason of things, and by our Saviour's express caution in all matters of this nature, it is evident that passions indulged

indulged to the utmost bounds of inno-
cency, are much harder to restrain from
entering into sinful degrees, than it was to
prevent their beginnings or arising at first.

Now the true account of this matter
seems plainly to be this: The words, *Be
ye angry*, are not a permission, as they
may seem to be when taken alone; but,
according to the nature and use of the
Jewish language, they are part of a single
proposition with those that follow. *Be ye
angry, and sin not*; that is, take heed and
beware of sinful anger. Indulge not anger,
lest ye fall into sin; or, if at any time
ye be provoked, then take particular care
that ye fall not into sin. For such is the
idiom of the Jewish language; to express
that in two distinct propositions, which
ought so to be understood, as if they were
put in one. There are many other texts
in scripture which will confirm this inter-
pretation; and the comparing them with
this, will reciprocally afford much light
towards the true understanding of several
of those passages.

In the Old Testament (Mal. i. 2, 3.),
Jacob have I loved, saith God, *and Esau
have I hated*. The propositions are not
to be understood afunder, but to be taken
together as one; Jacob have I loved,
more than Esau: for God did not in-
tend to express hatred towards Esau, but
only to love Jacob comparatively with
a great love. (Nahum, iii. 14.) *Fortify
strong holds, there shall the sword cut thee
off*: the intention is not to exhort Nineveh
to fortify herself, but to declare how much
soever she does fortify herself, yet shall
the sword cut her off. And so (Isaiah,
viii. 9.) *Gird yourselves, and ye shall be
broken in pieces*: i. e. how much soever ye
strengthen yourselves, yet shall ye be
broken. Again, (Eccl. xxx. 9.) *Cocker
thy child, and he shall make thee afraid; play
with him, and he will bring thee to heaviness*:
the proposition is but one; if thou
indulge thy child, he will bring thee to
sorrow. (Jer. vii. 22.) *I spake not unto
your fathers, nor commanded them in the day
that I brought them out of the land of Egypt,
concerning burnt offerings or sacrifices; but
this thing I commanded them, saying, obey
my voice*. The two parts of this sentence
of the prophet, are not to be taken sepa-
rately, as if he affirmed that God did not
require burnt-offerings at all; for it is
certain he did command them in the most
express words in the law; but the whole

is to be understood together, that God
did not insist upon burnt-offerings so much
as upon obedience to the commandments
of the moral law. There is a like expres-
sion (Hos. vi. 6.), *I desired mercy, and
not sacrifice*: the meaning is, not that God
did not require sacrifice, but that he de-
sired mercy, rather than sacrifice; and, as
it follows in the very next words, *the know-
ledge of the Lord more than burnt offerings*.
And thus also must be understood that
passage in Ezekiel (chap. xx. 25.), *I gave
them also statutes that were not good, and
judgments by which they should not live*: the
meaning is not evil statutes; God forbid;
but statutes which comparatively were
not good; and judgments, which were
not so profitable as moral ones, to cause
them to live.

In the New Testament, the same man-
ner of expression, agreeable to the nature
of the Jewish language, is likewise fre-
quently used; and it is necessary to be
taken notice of, in order to the true un-
derstanding of several passages. *I am not
sent*, saith our Saviour himself, discoursing
with the woman of Canaan, *but to the lost
sheep of the house of Israel*. (Matth. xv. 24.)
His meaning is not absolute, as might
seem from the first part of the sentence,
that he was not sent at all to any others
than the Jews only; but that he was not
sent so soon, so immediately, so princi-
pally; his mission was not to be made
known so early to any other nation, as to
the lost sheep of the house of Israel. For
that he was also in process of time to be a
light to lighten the gentiles, as well as
to be the glory of his people Israel, the
scripture of the prophets expressly enough
declared: and our Saviour himself in this
very place sufficiently intimates, when
immediately after that seeming refusal,
yet he effectually granted this stranger's
request, by healing the infirmity of her
daughter. And in his instructions to his
disciples (chap. x. 5.), he speaks with
less obscurity; *Go not into the way of the
gentiles, but go rather to the lost sheep of the
house of Israel*. Which afterwards was still
more clearly expressed by the apostles
(Acts, xiii. 46.), *It was necessary that the
word of God should first be spoken to the Jews,
but afterwards to the gentiles*. But not
to mention any other places, there is one
expression of St. Paul, of this nature, more
remarkable to the present purpose than
any other passage in the whole scripture.

In

In the sixth chapter of his epistle to the Romans, at the 17th verse, *God be thanked, saith he, that ye were the servants of sin: but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered to you.*

God be thanked, that ye were the servants of sin! it may seem a very strange and unusual expression, according to the manner of speaking in modern languages; but in the Jewish idiom it was very intelligible, that the two parts of the sentence should be taken as one; God be thanked, for that ye, who were once the servants of sin, have since obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine, which was delivered to you.

And thus likewise in the words of the text, *Be ye angry, and sin not.* That is, take heed and beware of sinful anger; indulge not anger, lest ye fall into sin; or, if at any time ye be provoked, then take particular care that ye fall not into sin.

It is the same caution, as in the government of all other passions and desires. So use the world, as not abusing it; so rejoice, as though ye rejoiced not; so weep, as those that wept not; so be angry, as that ye sin not. The meaning of the words being thus explained; that which remains, is,

I. That I endeavour, in a practical manner, to represent unto you what the kind or degree of that anger is, which must be charged as sinful.

II. That I briefly set before you some of the mischiefs and inconveniencies of allowing our passion to arise to such a sinful degree.

Before I enter upon which heads, it may be proper to premise two things:

1. That what shall be said concerning the nature of anger in particular, may with little variation be easily applied in general to the government of all other passions whatsoever. So that though the present subject of my discourse be particular, yet, by serious meditation, it may, without difficulty, be made universally useful towards regulating the conduct of human life. And,

2. That those things which scholastic writers upon this subject have made burthensome to the memory, and intricate to the understanding, by numerous definitions, and more nice than necessary distinctions, I shall endeavour to reduce under one single head, that what to persons of all capacities is their duty to practise, may, without affording matter for dispute or subtilty, be by all persons equally understood.

These things being premised, I proceed first to inquire, what the kind or degree of that anger is, which must be charged as sinful. And this will best be understood, by considering briefly what the nature and uses of our passions are, and for what intent they were implanted in us by our all-wise Creator.

Where reason and understanding are perfect, there is no room for any passion or commotion; and therefore in the most perfect being there is no passion. In God, there is, properly speaking, neither anger nor complacency, neither love nor hatred, neither joy nor sorrow. In him, there is no such thing as desire or aversion; no such commotion as either hope or fear. But his actions are determined always by perfect and unmixed reason, by eternal and unchangeable equity; which, in the supreme mind, is an uninterrupted calmness, like the serenity of the highest heavens. For though the scripture does indeed represent to us the divine actions as proceeding from passions like to ours, yet this is not representing them what they are really in him, but only in condescension to the weakness of our apprehensions, or with regard to their effects upon us. And as, in the same scripture, hands and feet and eyes are figuratively ascribed to him, who, in reality, without shape or figure is in all places every where alike present; so by the like analogy only it is, that to God are sometimes ascribed passions, for which there is no place in a mind where reason and understanding are perfect.

On the contrary, where there is no reason nor proper understanding at all, as in creatures inferior to us, there passions and appetites are the only springs of action; and by them are irrational creatures naturally and unavoidably directed.

Men, who, like beasts, are formed out of the dust of the earth, and yet, like angels, made after the image of God, are of a middle nature between these two states, between perfect reason and mere irrational appetites; being endued with appetites and passions to excite and stir them up to action, where their bare abstract understanding would leave them too remiss; and at the same time endued with reason also, to govern and restrain themselves, where mere appetites and passions would hurry them on to things exorbitant and unreasonable. Herein therefore particularly lies the principal duty of man; in keeping his

his passions subject to reason, and in governing his appetites by that understanding, wherewith God has distinguished him from the inferior creation.

The affections and passions are not in themselves evil, as some of the ancient philosophers vainly imagined, but were implanted in us by the wise Author of all things, for excellent ends and very useful purposes; that we, whose mixt nature of body and spirit would otherwise have made us too remiss, in pursuing the ends to which bare abstract reason directed us, might by the affections and passions, under the regulation of reason, and subservient to it, *i. e.* by reasonable fears and hopes, by love or hatred, by anger or complacency, be pushed on and excited to be more earnest and vigorous, more constant and diligent in all those actions of life which reason directs, and the affections execute.

But now when the passions, instead of obeying reason, over-rule and govern it; when they prevail against reason, so as to put men upon doing things which the reason of their minds at the same time forbids; or, which is much the same thing, when they become so violent as to abridge men of their liberty, and put them beside their reason, so as to leave them no room or time to judge whether the thing they are doing be reasonable or no; then it is that the passions become truly sinful: and man, who, when reason governs him, is the image of God, degenerates by the dominion of passion even below the nature of a beast. For those inferior creatures, when they obey their appetites, follow their nature; but the nature of man is to obey a higher principle, even reason and the law of God; to which he who is governed by passion is not subject, neither indeed can he be, and therefore degenerates below his proper nature; which is a folly, whereof inferior beings are not guilty.

From hence it becomes very evident, which was the first thing proposed, what the kind or degree of that anger is, which must be charged as sinful; namely, that it is then such, when it either puts men beside the use of their reason, or upon acting in any sort contrary to it.

The rule is one, and may without difficulty be universally understood by all men; but the application is infinite, and must be made by every one for his own particular. Every person knows, when he considers seriously with himself, that

his anger becomes then a sinful passion when it is stirred up without just cause, or upon any cause vents itself in indecent effects; when it spoils his temper by frequent returns, or by its violence exposes him to unseemly transports, or by its continuance degenerates into hatred and malice; when its height is disproportioned to the occasion that raised it, or unbecoming the character of the person provoked; or the circumstances be in any wise contrary to right reason and religion: which cases, though they are indeed infinitely various, and therefore cannot be expressed in any methodical direction; yet because the rule, as was said, is but one and unchangeably the same, therefore the application in practice is always easy: easy, I mean to be understood, that a man is then always to look upon his passion as sinful, when it either puts him beside the use of his reason, or upon acting any thing contrary to it, but not always so easy to be practised; because habitual passions are very apt to surprise men, and will not be prevented but by a constant guard. Yet because it is a necessary duty so to prevent and guard against them, therefore in order to persuade men to set about the practice of what is so indispensable and of so great importance, it is proper that I proceed,

II. To consider some of the mischiefs and inconveniencies of allowing our passions to prevail in any of the forementioned kinds or degrees.

And here we cannot but take notice, that even the heathen moralists themselves have filled their discourses with arguments against irregular and disorderly passions, drawn from the indecency and unseemliness of the thing itself; from the shame and indignity of a reasonable creature's being subject to such unreasonable slavery; from the uneasiness of it to ourselves; from the injuriousness of it to others; and from many other considerations, which prove a man, who is governed by his passion, to be incapable even of true philosophy; incapable of coming up to so much as the moral improvements even of a wise heathen.

And the scripture itself sometimes makes use of such natural arguments. From the folly of the thing itself (Ecc. vii. 9.) *Be not hasty in thy spirit to be angry; for anger resteth in the bosom of fools.* (Prov. xii. 16.) *A fool's wrath is presently known, but a prudent man cover-*

eth shame; (and chap. xiv. ver. 17. 29.) he that is slow to wrath, is of great understanding; but he that is soon angry, dealeth foolishly; and he that is hasty of spirit, exalteth folly. Again, from the contempt it draws upon men who are observed to be guilty of this weakness; *He that hath no rule over his own spirit, is like a city that is broken down, and without walls.* (Prov. xxv. 28.) From the frequent mischiefs and damages it brings upon them; *A man of great wrath shall suffer punishment; for if thou deliver him, yet thou must do it again* (Prov. xix. 19.): *Wrath killeth the foolish man, and envy slayeth the silly one.* (Job, v. 2.) Also from the natural excellency of the contrary practice; *He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty; and he that ruleth his spirit, than he that taketh a city.* (Prov. xvi. 32.)

But to us christians, there are still higher arguments to convince us of the mischief of being governed by our passions; and to persuade us of the necessity of restraining them within due bounds. For us to indulge our passions, is to deprive ourselves wholly of that temper, that frame and disposition of mind, which is the peculiar character and obligation of a christian. If a philosopher, if a wise heathen, upon the common principles of reason and morality; if a man, upon the bare consideration of the dignity of his nature above the beasts that perish, is under obligation to subdue his appetites and passions to reason; how much more is a christian bound to keep himself still under stricter and more severe restraints?

For when a christian indulges his passion, let him consider who it is that acts so unworthily, and behaves himself so unseemly: a man endued with reason and understanding; a man, whose reason is improved not by philosophy only, but moreover by the knowledge of the revealed will of God; a man, for whom Christ died; to whom God has been freely reconciled, and, out of mere mercy and undeserved compassion, vouchsafed to turn away his anger from him.

And against whom does this person direct the violence of his passion? Against a man like himself; against his friend or his brother, bone of his bone, and flesh of his flesh; one for whom Christ died as well as for himself, and by his own blood redeemed them both from death.

And what is it for, that one christian man is fiercely angry against another? Perhaps for a careless word, for an undesigned provocation, for a difference in opinion; possibly for retaining a good conscience, and not daring to do what the other expects of him, at most for some slight and trivial offence; for not being able to repay him his hundred pence, when God has forgiven them both their ten thousand talents.

Not that one christian may not, in a just and legal manner, compel another to do what is right and equitable; much less that superiors should not by their authority oblige inferiors to perform the proper duties of their respective stations; but that in these and all other cases, religion and equity be the ground; and reason, not passion, the measure of the compulsion.

If any thing in the world could make exorbitant passion excusable, it should seem to be when vice is the object of the displeasure, and concern for the honour of God the cause of the commotion: nevertheless, even in this case, our Saviour himself, when he was not only reviled, but was reviled also with blasphemy against God himself, yet reviled not again: and Michael the archangel, *when contending with the devil, yet did not bring against him a railing accusation, but said, the Lord rebuke thee.* (Jude 9.) And the scripture accordingly directs, that a *servant of God must not strive, but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient; in meekness, instructing them that oppose themselves, if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth.* For the wisdom that is from above, is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits. (St. James, iii. 17.) And St. Paul exhorts (Eph. iv. 31.), *Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice; and be ye kind one to another; tender hearted; forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake has forgiven you.*

There is a remarkable history to this purpose in the book of Jonah, where, upon God's repenting to execute his threatenings upon Nineveh, Jonah was displeased at it exceedingly, and he was very angry, and persisted in it, that *he did well to be angry, even unto death.* But God reprov'd him by the similitude of a gourd, at which Jonah was grieved when it

it perished suddenly; and the Lord said unto him, *Thou hadst pity on the gourd which came up in a night, and perished in a night, and should not I spare Nineveh, that great city?*

When once a man, whatever the occasion be, gives himself up to his passion, he is then out of the use of his reason, and he can never tell to what degree of unreasonableness he may be pushed on. *An angry man stirreth up strife, and a furious person will abound in transgression.* (Prov. xxix. 22.) As Cain's causeless displeasure against his brother increased by degrees beyond limit, until it ended in murder; so passion let loose, even upon the most just provocation, is like a torrent breaking through a bank, which will hardly be prevented from swelling till it leads us into sin. *My beloved, saith St. James, let every man be slow to wrath; for the wrath of man, even though it be against what is evil, yet worketh not the righteousness of God.*

The cause of such disorderly passions is always carelessness and want of seriousness; the remedy is consideration, attention, and frequent examination of a man's self, so as to keep a constant guard and watchfulness over his spirit. To be able perfectly to cure his temper, to conquer himself wholly, and change his disposition, is what no one ought to expect in this world; nor to be disappointed or discouraged, if he finds even the moderating of it to be a work of difficulty and time. But to endeavour to amend it daily is his indispensable duty: and he who considers how easily and suddenly he can restrain himself, at the coming in of a superior whom he reveres among men, must not pretend it impossible for him to govern his passions with the thoughts of the perpetual presence of God.

There have been some who have alleged, in excuse for themselves, that passage in scripture, that the apostles themselves were *men of like passions with us.* (Acts, xiv. 15.) But the intent of that passage is misunderstood, through an improper translation. For the intention of St. Paul and Barnabas speaking in that manner to the men of Lystra, was not to say that they were men of like passions, in the sense we now usually understand the word; but that they were men of like infirmities, mortal men like themselves, subject to diseases, casualties, and

death; and therefore not to be worshipped as Gods. So (James, v. 17.) *Elias was a man subject to like passions as we are:* the meaning is not that he was a passionate, but that he was a mortal man like one of us, and yet interceded effectually with God. But if the meaning was literal, that the apostles and prophets had the same passions with us, as undoubtedly they naturally had, yet this is no excuse for us, unless like them we govern them also by the rules of reason and religion. *Be ye angry, and sin not.*

S E R M O N XLVII.

Of the Nature of Lying.

EPHESIANS, iv. 25.

Wherefore putting away lying, speak every one truth with his neighbour.

THE duty enjoined in these words, *speak every one truth with his neighbour,* has ever been acknowledged by men of all conditions, to be our necessary and indispensable duty. Heathens as well as christians, men of all ranks and professions, of all sects and religions whatever, have agreed in this; that there is an eternal obligation founded in the nature of things, (which every man that attends to the dictates of his reason and conscience cannot but own and be sensible of,) that our words should be agreeable to our thoughts; and have been sensible that lying, or endeavouring to deceive each other, is a base and mean practice, unworthy the dignity of a rational nature, and highly displeasing to God, who has given us the use of that noble faculty of speech to this very end, that it might be the interpreter of our thoughts to each other. This is what every man understands, and readily assents to; but then what may properly be called a lie, and how far this obligation of speaking truth extends, hath been much disputed among learned men. Many have been of opinion, that it doth not bind us in all circumstances; and it is certain there are many instances alleged, as the learned Grotius observes, wherein not only the best heathen moralists, but many ancient christian writers also, have thought men not under any obligation, to speak the truth. That the abusing the power of speech to the damage and subverting of all

all civil society, when on the contrary it was given us to be the bond of society; that this is a great and crying sin, is readily acknowledged by all: but whether the making use of speech to deceive another in cases wherein it may seem that some public good is promoted thereby; whether this be such an abuse of speech as will come under the notion of a sinful lie, is not so obvious to determine.

In discoursing therefore upon this subject, I shall,

I. Endeavour to state clearly the nature of a lie, and what may properly be so called. And,

II. Proceed to consider the cases of difficulty arising thereupon.

God has created man a reasonable and a sociable creature: reasonable, as he is endowed with that excellent faculty of thinking; and sociable, as he has a power of communicating those thoughts. By the powers of thinking and reasoning, every individual man in particular, is exalted above the rank of brute creatures; is enabled to contemplate his own nature, and that of his fellow-creatures, and through them the perfections of his almighty Creator: but then by the power of communicating their thoughts, societies of men have this peculiar advantage, that they can farther improve and be assistant to each other; they can acquaint one another with their wants and necessities; they can comfort, instruct, exhort, reprove; in a word, they can so communicate their counsels, that as every particular person is concerned for the whole body, so the whole is concerned for the welfare of each particular. The natural way of communicating these thoughts, is by the use of speech; and as every particular man, without the faculty of thinking and reasoning, would be nothing superior to a beast, so societies of men without the use of some way of communicating their thoughts, could make no advantage or improvement of each other's reason and understanding. Now to make use of that means to the deceiving each other, which God gave us on purpose for mutual instruction, is a manifest perversion of so excellent a gift.

The great notion of a lie therefore, is an endeavouring to deceive another, by signifying that to him as true, which we ourselves think not to be so, in the ordinary way of communicating our thoughts.

First, I say, it is signifying that to ano-

ther as true, which we ourselves think not to be so. For if a man thinks a thing to be true, and relates it to others as such, though in the event it should prove really not to be true, yet this is not a lie, but only an error: for here it is plain the person himself is deceived, and hath no intention to impose upon another. Whatever therefore is amiss here, is accidental and involuntary; and all the fault he is guilty of in it, is rashness and hastiness of speech, in too positively declaring that to be true, which he has not taken sufficient care to be duly informed of. On the contrary, if a man thinks a thing not to be true, and yet declares it to another as certain, though in the event the thing should chance to prove true, yet since he knew it not, and believed it not to be so, his act is still the same, and may properly be called a lie.

Secondly, I say, this must be done in the ordinary and natural way of communicating our thoughts; that is, either by speech, or else by such signs as shall be agreed to be equivalent in the place of words: for though men do often conjecture at each other's thoughts and designs, from other various actions, yet if a man so orders his actions, as thereby to conceal from another his designs, which that other hath no right or just ground to expect to be acquainted with, and therein deceives him, (which in many cases is unquestionably lawful,) this cannot properly be accounted a lie.

Lastly, And to complete the notion of a lie, and which is the principal thing of all, the signifying that to another as true, which I know or think not to be so, must be done with a direct design to deceive him; for agreed forms of speaking have no deceit. From hence it follows, that all usual forms or schemes of rhetoric, all figurative expressions, though they seem to signify that as true which is not literally so, yet can by no means be accounted lies; and the same may likewise be said of fables, and parables, and mythological descriptions: for these were never intended to deceive men, or to give them false and wrong notions of things; but on the contrary to convey some certain truths more easily into their minds, and make a firmer impression upon them. Mankind is therefore well agreed about these things, that they are not to be understood literally; that there is a further sense in them which may be easily discovered, and will preserve

us from all mistakes about them. We frequently, in holy scripture itself, find the divine nature represented to us under corporeal similitudes; we find eyes and hands, and other parts of human bodies ascribed to God; which expressions, all men well understand to be only in way of condescension to us, a help to the imperfection of our understandings, to express his infinite perfections, his knowledge, and his power, in such a way, as we think and conceive of these things in ourselves.

In all such ways of speaking as these, we always have reason to presume, that those we speak to will understand our words in the same sense as we do. Although it may sometimes for very good reasons be allowable, when we use such words as are fairly capable of different meanings, to take them in any one of these senses, notwithstanding it be probable that the persons spoken to will take them in another; though, I say, this sometimes may be allowable, because as no man is obliged always to discover his whole mind, so doubtful ways of expressing himself are often one of the best means of concealing it; and our Saviour himself is observed to have sometimes used this manner of speaking; yet great prudence and caution is to be used in this matter; and above all things we ought to take heed, that we fall not by degrees into those deceitful and pernicious equivocations which have been allowed and encouraged by the great corrupters of religion in the church of Rome, and which tend manifestly to the subversion of all human society.

Further, from hence it follows that such untruths as are told by vain persons in a jesting manner, and in which there is no deceit, cannot in the strict and most proper sense of the word be called lies. For though all such discourse may justly seem unbecoming the gravity of a christian, and may perhaps be properly enough ranked under that foolish jesting which St. Paul styles not convenient, or, as the word may be rendered, unbecoming, (Eph. v. 4.) yet we cannot affirm that it is always strictly and absolutely unlawful. We often speak in an ironical manner, or there are in our discourse such evident signs and marks, as plainly enough shew, that we mean not in earnest, and that we have no design to deceive or impose upon the person we converse with. For otherwise, if a man really intends to delude another with a thing that is false, though

but in way of humour and abuse only, this is by no means excusable upon any ground; for to endeavour to deceive a man by abusing his credulity, in order to expose him for it afterwards, this is really an injurious lie, and can no way be excused by being told in jest: *As a madman who casteth firebrands, arrows, and death, so is the man that deceiveth his neighbour, and saith, am I not in sport?* (Prov. xxvi. 18, 19.)

To sum up therefore what has been said on this point: a lie strictly and properly so called, is such a manner of speaking, wherein, according to the ordinary signification of words, a man signifies that to another as true, which he himself either certainly knows or believes to be false, and that, with a design of imposing upon him.

And now, as to the several sorts or kinds of these lies, I hope it may here be premised in the first place, that much needs not be said concerning that sort of lying, which yet is of all others the most generally practised; namely, those mean ways of deceiving and over-reaching one another, which are so frequently used in traffic and bargaining. These, it is so evidently impossible to have any thing so much as pretended to be alleged in justification or excuse of them; they are so plainly and confessedly odious both to God and men; *Lying lips are an abomination to the Lord* (Prov. xii. 22.), *and a righteous man hateth lying* (Prov. xiii. 5.); these, I say, are so manifestly hateful both in the sight of God and all good men, they tend so apparently to the subversion of all justice and honesty, and consequently to the destruction of all civil society, that even some barbarous nations have made them severely punishable. The consciences of men do so naturally start at the baseness and meanness of this practice, that nothing needs be said to convince their judgments of the sinfulness and unlawfulness of it. They need only to have their passions moved, and their consciences awaked by being put in mind, that *the getting of treasures by a lying tongue, is a vanity tossed to and fro of them that seek death.* (Prov. xxi. 6.) For if men will but give themselves time to think, they cannot help but see, that if there be any such thing as right and wrong; if there be any such thing as justice and injustice; if there be any obligation to maintain faith and truth amongst men, to preserve society, order, and good government in the world, this kind of lying cannot but be in the highest degree unnatural and unlawful.

ful. Wherefore, not enlarging further upon this, I shall proceed now to the consideration of such cases, wherein many even learned men have pleaded with very plausible reasons, in justification and defence of the use of divers manners of falsifying. And,

First, In the case of those, to whom we have openly and justly declared ourselves enemies, as in the case of a lawful and necessary war. And these, they think, may not only be lawfully deceived by feints and stratagems, for these are granted on all hands to be unquestionably lawful; but they further contend, that it is allowable to make use of contracts and agreements, to the bringing about the same design, to effect this deceit by the use of falsehood and treachery, by breaking promise, and the like. The reason and equity of which manner of proceeding, they imagine to be this: that those who have openly professed themselves enemies, have, as they conceive, forfeited all the right they had to truth, as they have to many other parts of justice, charity, and other virtues, which we are bound to exercise to others; and that therefore, as we may use all means we can to annoy and endamage them, and may despoil them of their goods, and even of life itself, so they fancy we may also deprive them of the benefits of words and contracts, without any injury or injustice.

Secondly, In the education of children; that is, of such as are already arrived to some, though not a perfect use of their reason; to these the persons I am speaking of conceive we are not obliged to speak the truth; not because they have no right to truth, or have lost that right by any forfeiture, but because they are not capable of receiving and judging of it; so that because they are not come to a full use of their reason and judgment, that is, are not in a state capable of judging truly of our thoughts by our words, therefore though our words be not agreeable to our thoughts, yet we cannot, they suppose, be said to do them any wrong.

Thirdly, The last case wherein falsehood has been by many thought justifiable, is, when some public benefit is thereby promoted; in which case they fancy they may presume upon men's consent, that they are willing to be deceived; that they would give up their right by which they might exact truth of us, did they know the reasons that moved us to deceive them.

To this case may be referred those pious frauds, when, without any apparent injury to any man, as they think, men contrive certain forgeries for the promotion of religion, as they imagine, and for the service of God.

These are the chief cases in which, and the reasons why, several of the heathen philosophers, and even some christian writers also, have thought falsehood allowable, or at least excusable. Whether they had any just and sufficient reason so to do, will best appear by inquiring first into the nature of truth, and the foundation of our obligation to speak always what we think agreeable to it, and their applying it to the particular cases. Now they who think a lie, properly so called, to be in several cases lawful, consider truth merely as a civil compact, to which mankind tacitly consents; an agreement, as it were, amongst men for their more convenient living together, to represent things to one another faithfully and as they really are. They look upon truth as a matter of private concern, as if one man laid upon another all the obligation he has to it, and consequently could release him from that obligation either by his fault, or his incapacity, or his consent. Thus truth becomes merely one and the same thing with justice; and falsehood ceases to be a fault, unless when it is joined with manifest injury and wrong: from hence it follows, that, since when a man has forfeited or voluntarily receded from his right to any thing, it may without injustice be withheld from him; in such cases as those, according to this notion, a lie will seem to be no longer blame-worthy.

But now, that we are on the contrary really under an obligation to truth, distinct from and independent on that of mere justice, may appear from the following considerations:

First, That every man's conscience naturally convinces him, that he is under an obligation to truth, distinct from all other considerations; so that it will not without reluctance suffer him to deceive his neighbour with a lie, even though he does not foresee any real injury or damage that will thereupon accrue to him. In the natural judgment of our minds, we cannot forbear thinking, that there is something in truth, that is great, and noble, and honourable; and something in falsehood that is mean and base, unworthy of a man, and which renders him contemptible and vile,

vile, even abstracted from what benefit or mischief we may fancy will ensue. It is a fault which always hides its head, and being ashamed of itself, and may even be remitted to its own convictions. Hence lying has always been esteemed the vice of slaves and vassals, of the meanest and most contemptible sort of persons: but men of any honour and reputation have always necessarily an abhorrence and detestation of it; so that though they should even be persuaded of the lawfulness of it in any particular cases, yet would they still avoid it in those very cases as much as they could, and never practise it without reluctance and regret. Now all this is very unaccountable, if truth were nothing more but only a part of justice; for why then should it not be thought as honourable to spread a lie at any time for the public advantage, which is a vice that parties and factions of men are very apt to be guilty of, as to speak the truth for the same end? And if all the moral evil of falsehood consisted only in the injustice of it, why should it be thought dishonourable or base to make use of it in cases where that reason ceases, when it is certain all the real dishonour of any action can arise only from the badness or moral evil of it? Wherefore, since even in such cases, where we may fancy that no injury is done by it, yet nature nevertheless starts and recoils at falsehood, as at a thing unworthy of us; since we feel always a secret judgment within our minds, that moves and prompts us to truth, and forcibly persuades us of its obligation; since we feel an inward satisfaction when we strictly practise it, and on the other hand are ashamed when we have acted contrary to it; this shows us the native and genuine excellency of truth, considered simply in itself; and that the inward sense of our conscience is against all falsehood and lies; in a word, this shews us that there is something sacred and divine in truth which will never suffer us to be discharged from its obligation. It must be confessed indeed, it may sometimes happen, that a man's speaking truth will be a hindrance to another, when falsifying would turn to his advantage: but then this arises from the unhappy circumstances of that state into which men have brought themselves by sin. Were man in a state of innocence and perfection, our duty would be inseparably united with our interest; and there

could be no case wherein a man's performing his duty, could be any disadvantage either to himself or his neighbour. If therefore men's sins make no alterations in their obligations to moral duties, and in an innocent world truth would be confessedly our unalterable and universal duty; it is hard to say why it should not be so now, though through the sin and corruption of men it may so fall out, that falsehood would promote my neighbour's interest, and that truth must necessarily turn to his disadvantage.

Secondly, That our obligation to truth is distinct from that of merely not injuring our neighbour, appears farther from this consideration; that in our notion of the supreme and most perfect being, veracity and justice are two distinct perfections or attributes: for as religion in general is an imitation of the life of God, so particular moral virtues are imitations and transcripts of the divine perfections. Now if the veracity and justice of God be not allowed to be distinct perfections, it will not be easy to shew how God can be said to be absolutely a God that cannot lie, as the apostle styles him; for then it must be granted that he might also represent things to us otherwise than they are, as well as men may one to another; and might make false revelations to his creatures in all those instances wherein men may use deceit one to another; that is, where there appears no injustice or injury in so doing; where it should happen to be our advantage, or at least no disadvantage to be thus dealt with. For what can make any difference in this case? Justice is unquestionably the same in God as in men; and if truth be nothing else but justice, whatever falsehood is not injurious, might as well be used by God as by men.

But now this has always seemed too harsh for our reason to apprehend; and therefore we find that Plato, though he was weakly of opinion that earthly princes might sometimes make use of falsehood for the benefit and good of the commonwealth, as he fancied; yet he would not affirm the same of God, the supreme governor of all things; because he thought it would argue some kind of infirmity and imperfection in him, to stand in need of having recourse to such means as these. From whence it manifestly appears, that men are naturally convinced in their consciences, that veracity is a virtue distinct

from justice; and that there is a moral obligation to truth, immutable, and founded in the nature of things, distinct from that of not injuring our neighbour. Now this being so, the cases of difficulty before mentioned will easily be accounted for. For,

First, If one man's not performing his duty cannot excuse another from performing his, then are we as certainly bound not to break our word with an enemy as we are obliged to perform several other acts of faithfulness and charity to him. To which purpose it is observable, that when the Roman empire was in its greatest splendour and most flourishing state; that is, when they were most eminent above other nations for their virtue and honour; they would sooner die (of which there are several instances given us by Tully and others) than break their faith or word with an enemy.

Again, If another's incapacity in some degree to judge of my performing rightly my duty to him, cannot excuse me from my obligation to that duty; then are we certainly obliged to have regard to truth, in what is said even to children; and it would perhaps be of more considerable consequence in the education of children than is generally imagined, if care was taken not to amuse them with false promises, which they very early discover, and which do but insensibly wean them from that veneration they ought always to have for truth, and reconcile them by degrees to falsehood, from which nature is averse: great heed ought to be taken not only what is done, but even what is spoken also in the presence of a child.

Lastly, If we may not in other cases do any small evil that good may come of it; why should it be thought lawful to lie, though even for an appearance of public advantage? which public advantage is never indeed any thing else but the present interest of some particular party or faction. And as for matters of religion, it is certain nothing is more odious in the sight of God, *than to accept his person, and speak deceitfully for him*, as it is expressed. (Job, xiii. 7.) God is truth, and his religion is truth; and men might as well undertake to make light darkness, or darkness light, as pretend to endeavour to advance the truth of God, by making lies and pious frauds their instrument. Those of the church of Rome have often

been very guilty in this particular, and great occasion has thereby been given to the enemies of God to blaspheme. For whilst some ill-designing men have pretended to advance the interest of religion, that is, their own errors, by such indirect means, others have been tempted to think the whole is nothing but a fiction; and that religion itself has little countenance from truth, when its professors choose to make lies their refuge.

It remains, that after what has been said, I make a practical observation or two, and so conclude.

First, *Lying lips are an abomination to the Lord*, saith Solomon. (Prov. xii. 22, vi. 16, &c.) *These six things doth the Lord hate, yea, seven are an abomination unto him; a proud look, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood, an heart that deviseth wicked imaginations, feet that be swift in running to mischief, a false witness that speaketh lies, and him that soweth discord among brethren.* And it is very observable, that both in the Old and New Testament, idols and corruptions in divine worship, which are the greatest abominations in the sight of God, are described under the name of lies and lying vanities; and idolaters, under the title of liars. *Jerusalem hath wearied herself with lies*, that is, with idols. (Ezek. xxiv. 12.) So (Rev. xxi. 8.) *The fearful and unbelieving and the abominable, and murderers and whoremongers, and sorcerers and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone; after which, giving a large description of the heavenly Jerusalem, he adds, (ver. 27.) And there shall in no wise enter into it any thing that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh an abomination, or maketh a lie: and, (Rev. xxii. 15.) Without are dogs, and sorcerers, and whoremongers, and murderers, and idolaters, and whosoever loveth and maketh a lie.* God in scripture is sometimes called Truth; and as the perfection of religion is the imitation of God in his communicable attributes, so a necessary part of that imitation, is an endeavouring to be like him in his veracity. *The devil is a liar and the father of lies; and they that follow him therein, are said to be in covenant with hell* (Isa. xxviii. 15.): *We have made a covenant with death, and with hell are we at agreement; when the overflowing scourge shall pass through, it shall not come unto us; for we have made lies our refuge, and under falsehood*

falsehood have we hid ourselves: the punishment follows, (ver. 17.) Therefore thus saith the Lord, judgment will I lay to the line, and righteousness to the plummet, and the hail shall sweep away the refuge of lies, and the waters shall overflow the hiding place; and your covenant with death shall be disannulled, and your agreement with hell shall not stand; when the overflowing scourge shall pass through, then shall ye be trodden down by it. Again, (Jer. ix. 5, 8, 9.) They shall deceive every one his neighbour, and will not speak the truth; they have taught their tongues to speak lies, and weary themselves to commit iniquity; their tongue is an arrow shot out, it speaketh deceit; one speaketh peaceably to his neighbour with his mouth, but in heart he layeth his wait: shall I not visit for these things, saith the Lord, and shall not my soul be avenged on such a nation as this?

Secondly, As lies are thus abominable in the sight of God, so are they also to all good men; *a righteous man, saith Solomon, hateth lying (Prov. xiii. 5.); and king David in the 101st Psalm, which contains a brief account of his religious and pious conversation, declares, that he would not so much as suffer a servant, that was used to tell lies, to continue in his house (ver. 6, 7.); He that walketh in a perfect way, he shall serve me; but he that worketh deceit shall not dwell within my house; he that telleth lies shall not tarry in my sight.*

Thirdly, This sin of lying tends in its own nature to the destruction of all civil society; *Lie not one to another, saith St. Paul, for we are members one of another; members of the same political body as we are men; and by a stricter tie, members of the same mystical body as we are christians: wherefore as there is one hope of our calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of us all, so ought there to be one mind and one heart, with simplicity and sincerity, that speaking the truth in love, we may grow up into him in all things, who is the head, even Christ.*

SERMON XLVIII.

The Nature of relative Duties.

COLOSSIANS, iii. 20, 21, 22.

Children, obey your parents in all things; for this is well pleasing unto the Lord. Fathers provoke not your children to anger, lest they be discouraged. Servants, obey in all things your masters according to the flesh.

IT is the constant method of St. Paul in all his epistles, first to enlarge upon and explain distinctly the particular point or question which was the occasion of his writing at that time to that particular church; and then to add such general exhortations to the practice of all christian duties and virtues as might at all times be of use to all churches, and to every christian in all ages and in every part of the world. These general exhortations are, in the main, the same in all his epistles; easy and plain, universal and unvaried, suited to all capacities, and containing the most important and fundamental principles of religion. The former part of the several epistles usually relates to some particular controversy between the Jewish and Gentile converts, which at that time gave trouble to the apostles: and these parts of his writings cannot be rightly understood any other way, than by attending carefully to the occasion and state of the particular question which he is there determining. And therefore it has been a great error in these latter ages of the world, and the cause of many vain disputes among christians, that, without attending to the design and scope of a discourse written in an argumentative manner, men have frequently picked out and applied to themselves single passages, which, in the course of the apostle's argument, had plainly a view only to the state of the then Jewish or Gentile church. From this one mistake, it is evident, have sprung all the vain controversies concerning faith and works, concerning justification and sanctification, concerning election and reprobation, and the like: wherewith while the minds of men have been needlessly distracted, they have been the less apt to attend to the great and weightier matters of the law, to the moral and

general exhortations, repeated and inculcated universally in every epistle, as things by every christian undisputably easy to be understood, and indispensably necessary to be practised.

The words of my text are part of the general exhortation, which concludes the epistle to the Colossians. In the beginning of this chapter the apostle exhorts them to set their affections on heavenly things, to mortify every vicious and inordinate appetite, to lay aside all malice and contentiousness among themselves, and to live in the practice of universal love, charity, and good-will: and in the latter part of the chapter he recommends to them the relative duties of life: the duties of husbands and wives, of children and parents, of masters and servants, of superiors and inferiors in all relations. *Children, obey your parents in all things; for this is well pleasing unto the Lord: fathers, provoke not your children to anger lest they be discouraged: servants, obey in all things your masters according to the flesh.*

In discoursing upon these words, I shall,

I. Distinctly take notice of the several particulars contained in the text. And,

II. I shall thence deduce this general observation; that the due performance of the relative duties of life is a principal means of obtaining both the blessings of the present world, and the happiness of that which is to come.

I. That which stands first and most obviously observable in the text is this precept; *Children, obey your parents.* In his epistle to the Ephesians, the same apostle expresses this precept thus: *Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right: honour thy father and mother, which is the first commandment with promise.* (Chap. vi. 1.) In which expression there is an allusion to the order or placing of the commandments in the law of Moses; this being the first in the second table, the first of these commandments which declare our duty towards men; the first to which is annexed expressly a particular reward; the first commandment with promise. The natural observation arising from which particular is, the reasonableness and goodness of the great commandments of God both in the law and the gospel. God begins where nature itself does; making the same things to be the prime

foundations of his law, which in the nature of things themselves, without any law, were most reasonable to be practised. The gospel carries indeed this and all other moral precepts to a much higher degree of improvement, requiring us to extend our love towards all men, and our desire of doing good even to enemies themselves. But the prior obligation is, that of gratitude to benefactors; and of making just returns to those from whom we have received the benefits of life. Nevertheless, as clear as this obligation is, both in the nature of things and in the command of God, yet not irreligion and atheism only, but superstition also, has found means to evade this, in like manner as it does all other moral and eternal obligations. God, says our Saviour (Mat. xv. 4.), *God commanded saying, honour thy father and mother: but ye say, whatsoever shall say to his father or his mother, it is a gift by whatsoever thou mightest be profited by me,* that is, it is given to the service of the temple, or to some other of what they then called pious uses, *he shall be free;* he shall be discharged from all obligation to relieve his necessitous parents. *Thus,* says our Lord, *ye have made the commandment of God of none effect by your tradition.* Notions somewhat of the same nature have, in all ages of the world, prevailed over superstitious and corrupt minds; teaching them to value things that promote outward pomp and show, and distinctions of men under party denominations, more than obedience to the eternal and unchangeable duties of God's moral law.

2. The next thing proper to be taken notice of in the text is, that the particulars here mentioned of the duty of children and servants, are only instances of the general exhortation, designed to extend proportionably to persons in all relative stations and circumstances of life whatsoever. As (Rom. xiii. 7.) *Render to all their dues; tribute, to whom tribute is due; custom, to whom custom; fear, to whom fear; honour, to whom honour.* To magistrates, there is due from the subject obedience according to the laws of the country, in matters not opposite to the law of God; peaceableness and quietness under government, and a willing contribution towards the support of it. To teachers, or spiritual superiors, there is due from the people such respect, as to stewards

stewards of the mysteries of God, appointed to exhort men continually to the practice of virtue, and to assist in all the administrations of religion: towards these, there ought to be in men a willingness to hear and be informed by them, and a readiness to observe and practise what they teach; not blindly and implicitly, which is the doctrine of Rome, but in all things which they can show to be the doctrine and commands of God. To masters, there is due from servants diligence and industry, honesty and fidelity, submission and obedience, according to the direction in the text; *Servants, obey your masters according to the flesh; not with eyeservice, as men-pleasers, but in singleness of heart, fearing God; and whatsoever ye do, do it heartily as to the Lord, and not unto men.* In like manner (Eph. vi. 7.), *With good will, says he, doing service as to the Lord, and not to men; knowing that whatsoever good thing any man does, the same shall he receive of the Lord, whether he be bond or free.* The only difference here to be observed is, that whereas the servants mentioned by the apostle were in those days slaves, under the absolute power of their masters, without any relief under the greatest oppressions; for which reason St. Peter exhorts such to be patient under the severest hardships, considering that *it is thank-worthy, if a man for conscience towards God endure grief, suffering wrongfully*: whereas, I say, in the apostles days, the state of servants was absolute slavery; it is now on the contrary always to be understood, that the duty and obligation of those in the lowest station towards their respective superiors in this kind, is such only as arise from law and contract, and is wholly limited by those measures. And this concerning the several particular relative persons, to whom the apostle designed his exhortation to extend.

3. The third particular observable in the text is, the unbounded manner in which the apostle expresses the general duty of subjection to superiors, in every relative station of life: *Children, obey your parents in all things: servants, obey in all things your masters according to the flesh.* So elsewhere: *Let the wives, says he, be subject to their own husbands in every thing: and (Tit. ii. 9.) Exhort servants to be obedient to their own masters; and to please them well in all things.* Reason, and the nature of things, and the general usage of

all language, sheweth, that in these and all other the like expressions, the phrase, in every thing, and in all things, must necessarily be understood to mean only in all things just, in all things lawful, in all things that are honest and fit to be done. In human writings, these general manners of expression, arising from the known and vulgar use of language, are never misunderstood: and therefore to misunderstand them in the sacred books only, is mere perverseness. The gospel neither enlarges nor diminishes any superior's power; it neither adds to, nor takes from the inferior's right. In these cases, it only confirms and explains the obligations of nature, and enforces the practice of the respective duties, with stronger and more powerful motives. As therefore in all other writings, so in scripture likewise, the true, the natural, and evident meaning of such phrases as these, in all things, in every thing, and the like; is not what the word all suggests in its single signification, but what the vulgar sense of it is in such expressions and sentences. When we are taught that the commands of God, or the laws of truth and right, are to be obeyed in all things; the nature of the thing, not the force of the single words, shews that the obedience is to be universal and without exception. In other cases, where the very same words are used, as in the text, *servants, obey your masters in all things*; the nature of the thing there likewise no less plainly shews, that this obedience in all things is to be limited, by its consistency with the commands of any superior master either on earth or in heaven. In all language, the signification of every word necessarily depends upon the other words with which it is connected: and where no controversy is concerned, or prejudice interposes, it is always understood, and cannot but be understood to be so by all understandings, and by all capacities equally, from the highest to the meanest. When the scripture mentions the everlasting God, it is not the force of the word everlasting, but the application of it to the first cause and author of all things, that makes it denote a true and absolute eternity: for when the same scripture mentions the everlasting mountains, it is understood by all men both of the greatest and of the smallest understandings, that it there signifies only such a duration as is proper to the sub-

ject of which it is spoken. These things are, in their own nature, exceedingly evident; and yet where party, or interest, or controversy is concerned, it is wonderful to what a degree men have sometimes, even in so plain a case, imposed upon the ignorant, and upon the learned too. I shall mention but one instance, and leave others to be judged of by the same proportion. In the question about transubstantiation, the writers of the church of Rome allege with great confidence, that the natural, the literal, the first and obvious sense of the words, *this is my body*, is plainly in favour of their side of the question. And yet in reality, the very contrary to this is evidently true. For the natural, the literal, the first and obvious sense of the phrase, is not that which arises from the signification of the word *body* singly, but that which arises from its natural signification in such an expression wherein commemorative bread is affirmed to be the body of him who is commemorated thereby. When a picture is spoken of as being the person it represents, the natural, the literal, the first and obvious sense of the expression, is not that it is really, but that it is representatively, that person. When our Lord says, *I am the true vine*; the question is not what the word *vine* naturally signifies in other cases, but what it there most naturally and obviously signifies, when a teacher calls himself a vine and his followers its branches. When wisdom declares concerning herself (Ecc. xxiv. 21.). *They that eat me, shall yet be hungry, and they that drink me, shall yet be thirsty*; the natural and obvious, nay, the literal signification of the whole sentence, arises from what the terms, *eat* and *drink*, do then most naturally and obviously signify, when a person is speaking, not concerning food, but about imbibing and digesting a doctrine. But to return from this digression.

4. The next particular observable in the text is, the reason or motive annexed by the apostle in order to enforce his exhortation: *For this*, says he, *is well pleasing unto the Lord*. In his epistle to the Ephesians, as I before observed, after having laid down the same exhortation as in the text; instead of enforcing it, as he does here, with telling them that *this is well pleasing unto the Lord*; he cites the words of the commandment itself, *Honour thy father and thy mother*; and adds, by

way of observation, that *this is the first commandment with promise*. (Chap. vi. 2.) The promise he means is, *that thy days may be long, in the land which the Lord thy God hath given thee*. By which promise, as delivered in the commandment to the Jews, God by a wise and suitable disposition of things, very aptly annexed the blessing of long life to them that paid due regard to those who were the means of giving them life. But then, even under the law, very certainly, though not so explicitly as in the revelation of the gospel, it is always to be understood, that in all promises of this nature, there was a further reference to a future and a better life. Thus in the 11th to the Hebrews, the apostle assures, that Abraham understood the promised inheritance to be laid up for him in that heavenly city *which has no foundations, whose builder and maker is God*. Thus the prophetic tradition among the ancient Jews, that Jerusalem should be built up with sapphires (Tobit, xii. 16.), is by St. John made the description of that city of God, which cometh down from heaven. Thus our Saviour's promise, that *the meek shall inherit the earth* (Mat. v. 5.), may well have reference at least, if it be not expressly applied by him in his first intention, to that *new heaven and new earth, wherein righteousness is to dwell for ever*. Thus, to mention but one instance more, that expression of Ezekiel (chap. xiii. 9.), they shall not be in the *assembly of my people, neither shall they be written in the writing of the house of Israel, neither shall they enter into the land of Israel*; cannot be doubted but that it implicitly means the same thing as in the New Testament language, being not *written in the book of life*.

5. And lastly, From the relative antithesis in the respective parts of the text; *Children, obey your parents in all things*; and, *Fathers, provoke not your children to anger*; it is observable, that as in nature, in the frame and construction of this material fabric of the universe, all operations of the parts of matter are mutual upon each other for the support and preservation of the whole; so in morality and religion, all duties are of reciprocal obligation. Wherever the duty of the inferior is mentioned, it is always to be understood that the duty of the superior is proportionably supposed. Parents are to support, and be gentle towards their children;

children; *bringing them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.* (Eph. vi. 4.) Masters are to exact service, not rigorously and cruelly, but with mildness, and according to the terms contracted for. Governors in the church are not to lord it over the heritage of God, nor to assume to themselves dominion over the consciences of men; but, as faithful stewards of the mysteries of God, to assist men in understanding the will of God, and to exhort them continually to practise it in peace and love. Magistrates are to govern according to those instructions of Job (chap. xxix. 14.), *I put on righteousness, and it clothed me; my judgment was as a robe and a diadem. I was eyes to the blind, and feet was I to the lame. I was a father to the poor; and the cause which I knew not I searched out.* Lastly, princes, or supreme civil governors, are to use power within the limits of law and reason: considering the admonition of the author of the Book of Wisdom (chap. vi. 2.), *Give ear, you that rule the people, and that glory in the multitude of nations; for power is given you of the Lord, and sovereignty from the Highest, who shall try your works, and search out your counsels: for he which is Lord over all shall fear no man's person, neither shall he stand in awe of any man's greatness: for he hath made the small and great, and careth for all alike.*

II. Having thus at large considered the several distinct particulars contained in the text, I shall now briefly from the whole, deduce this general observation; that the due performance of the relative duties of life is a principal means of obtaining both the blessings of the present world, and the happiness of that which is to come. As to the happiness of the life to come, the promise of that being annexed to the observance of all God's commandments in general, needs not here be particularly enlarged upon: it is sufficiently implied in these words of my text, *this is well pleasing unto the Lord.* But what in this case is peculiarly remarkable, is, that the blessings and happiness of the present life are not only by the promise of God annexed to, but even in the nature of things do essentially consist in the due performance of these relative duties. As in the natural body the health and preservation of the whole depends upon every part's performing its proper office; so in every political society,

inferiors and superiors in all the various stations of life depend mutually upon each other, and the welfare of the whole upon the duties of both. Superiors, in the conscientious performance of their duty, are the protectors and guardians of the rights and properties of those below them: and inferiors, acting under a sense of duty, moved by love and reason more than by compulsion and fear, are the most solid support of the authority and peace and happiness of those above them. The corruption and depravity of mankind make it necessary, by the intervention of human laws, to compel men in some measure to perform these respective duties; but a true sense of religion, and of the reasonableness and usefulness and essential obligation of the duties themselves, would oblige them by a much stronger and securer tie, to do all the same things freely and willingly, heartily and sincerely, in public and in private; which the best and wisest laws can but compel those who want such a sense of religion to do unwillingly, slightly, and superficially, in public appearance only, and in the sight of men. Religion therefore and true virtue, if they prevailed in the world, would obtain the same happy ends fully and effectually which the best and wisest laws can do but in part; and laws are made only to supply, in the best manner they can, the want of true religion and virtue among men. *The law is not made for a righteous man, but for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and for sinners, for the unholy and the profane.* (1 Tim. i. 9.) Did men universally, from a sense of the right and reason of the thing itself, live in an uniform and conscientious performance of the relative duties of life, the prophecies of that great happiness which under typical representations is foretold as coming in the days of the Messiah, would be literally fulfilled (Is. ii. 4.): *They shall beat their swords into plough-shares, and their spears into pruning-hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more: and (chap. lx. 18.) Violence shall no more be heard in thy land, wasting nor destruction within thy borders; but thou shalt call thy walls salvation, and thy gates praise: thy people also shall be all righteous.* But however, even as things now are, would superiors in all times and places, who are the great example and direction

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to the world, endeavour, each, in their respective stations, to make use of that power wherewith God has entrusted them, always to the protection and support of right; the benefits which would thence accrue to mankind, even in this present imperfect and corrupt state, would be inconceivably great. (2 Sam. xxiii. 3.) *He that ruleth over men must be just, ruling in the fear of God; and he shall be as the light of the morning, when the sun riseth, even a morning without clouds; as the tender grass springing out of the earth, by clear shining after rain.* And (Psal. lxxii. 4.) *He shall judge the people according unto right, and defend the poor, and punish the wrong-doer. He shall come down like rain into a fleece of wool, even as the drops that water the earth: in his time shall the righteous flourish, yea, and abundance of peace so long as the moon endureth.*

S E R M O N XLIX.

By BISHOP PORTEUS.

A serious and devout Observation of the Lord's Day enforced.

DEUTERONOMY, v. 12.

Keep the sabbath-day, to sanctify it, as the Lord thy God hath commanded thee.

THE appropriation of one day in seven to the purposes of religion, is a practice peculiar to the Jewish and the Christian revelations; and it is a practice so full of wisdom, utility, and humanity, that it may well be produced as one argument, among many others still more convincing, of their divine original.

By comparing together the primary institution of the sabbath, as related in the book of Genesis, and the alterations it afterwards received from our Saviour and his apostles, it is evident that the Christian sabbath is to be considered under two distinct points of view.

First, As a day of rest from labour.

Secondly, As a day set apart for the public worship of God.

I. As a day of rest from labour.

This rest was, by the Mosaic law, so rigorously exacted, that the violation of it was prohibited under no less a penalty than that of death. (Exod. xxxv. 2.) Our divine Master, in this, as well as in many other instances, greatly softened the seve-

riety of that law. But yet it was plainly his intention, that there should be a general cessation of labour on this day. The original reason for this part of the institution still subsisted in his days, and must subsist till the end of time; namely, that it might be a standing memorial of the great work of creation, from which the Almighty Author of it rested, or ceased, on the seventh day, and therefore he blessed and sanctified that day for ever. To this Christ himself added another reason of a similar nature; having on the following day rested from the great work of redemption, which he completed by rising from the dead. Our abstinence, therefore, from the ordinary occupations of life on the Lord's day, is a tacit kind of acknowledgment that we were created by God, and redeemed by Christ, and that we are duly sensible of the duties resulting from those relations. It appears, moreover, that our Lord himself very religiously observed the rest of the sabbath; which he no otherwise interrupted than by miracles of mercy and compassion. And we may most certainly conclude, that the very same benevolence of disposition which dictated these humane exceptions, would prompt him also to improve and enforce, both by his doctrine and example, the general rule of resting on the seventh day: for never was there any injunction so replete with kindness and compassion to the whole human race, especially to the lowest and most wretched part of it, as this. There cannot be a more pleasing or a more consolatory idea presented to the human mind, than that of one universal pause of labour throughout the whole christian world at the same moment of time; diffusing rest, comfort, and peace, through a large part of the habitable globe, and affording ease and refreshment, not only to the lowest part of our own species, but to their fellow-labourers in the brute creation. Even these are enabled to join in this silent act of adoration, this mute kind of homage to the great Lord of all; and although they are incapable of any sentiments of religion, yet by this means they become sharers in the blessings of it. Every man of the least sensibility must see, must feel the beauty and utility of such an institution as this; and must see, at the same time, the cruelty of invading this most valuable privilege of the inferior class of mankind, and breaking in upon that sacred repose which

which God himself has, in pity to their sufferings, given to those that stand most in need of it. It was a point in which it highly became the majesty and the goodness of Heaven itself to interpose. And happy was it for the world that it did so. For had man, unfeeling man, been left to himself, with no other spur to compassion than natural instinct, or unassisted reason, there is but too much ground to apprehend he would have been deaf to the cries of his labouring brethren, would have harassed and worn them out with incessant toil, and when they implored, by looks and signs of distress, some little intermission, would perhaps have answered them in the language of Pharaoh's task-masters, *Ye are idle, ye are idle. There shall not ought of your daily tasks be diminished; let more work be laid upon them, that they may labour therein.* (Exod. v. 9. 11. 17.)

That this is no uncandid representation of the natural hardness of the human heart, till it is subdued and softened by the influences of divine grace, we have but too many unanswerable proofs, in the savage treatment which the slaves of the ancients, even of the most civilized and polished ancients, met with from their unrelenting masters. To them, alas! there was no sabbath, no seventh day of rest! The whole week, the whole year, was, in general, with but few exceptions, one uninterrupted round of labour, tyranny, and oppression.

To these inhumanities the merciful temper of our religion has in a great measure put an end; but there are others, arising from the most shameful intrusions on the sacred leisure of the sabbath, which it has not yet been able to overcome. Look into the streets of this great metropolis on the Lord's day, and see whether they convey the idea of a day of rest. Do not our servants and our cattle seem to be almost as fully occupied on that day as on any other? And, as if this was not a sufficient infringement of their rights, we contrive, by needless entertainments at home, and by needless journeys abroad, which are often by choice and inclination reserved for this very day, to take up all the little remaining part of their leisure time. A sabbath-day's journey was, among the Jews, a proverbial expression for a very short one. Among us it can have no such meaning affixed to it. That day seems to be considered by too many as set apart,

by divine and human authority, for the purpose, not of rest, but of its direct opposite, the labour of travelling; thus adding one day more of torment to those generous but wretched animals whose services they hire; and who, being generally strained beyond their strength the other six days of the week, have, of all creatures under heaven, the best and most equitable claim to suspension of labour on the seventh. Considerations such as these may perhaps appear to some below the dignity of this place, and the solemnity of a christian assembly: but benevolence, even to the brute creation, is, in its degree, a duty no less than to our own species; and it is mentioned by Solomon as a striking feature in the character of a righteous man, that *he is merciful even to his beast.* He, without whose permission *not a sparrow falls to the ground, and who feedeth the young ravens that call upon him,* will not suffer even the meanest work of his hands to be treated cruelly with impunity. He is the common Father of the whole creation. He takes every part of it under his protection. He has, in various passages of scripture, expressed his concern even for irrational creatures, and has declared more especially, in the most explicit terms, that the rest of the sabbath was meant for our cattle and our servants as well as for ourselves.

II. But cessation from labour is not the only duty of the Lord's day. Although it is to be a day of rest, yet it is not to be, what too many seem willing to make it, a day of indolence and inactivity. There are employments marked out for it of a very important nature; and of these the first and most essential is, the public worship of God.

It is evident, both from reason and scripture, that public worship is a most useful and indispensable duty. It is equally evident, that if this duty is to be performed, some fixed and stated time for performing it is absolutely necessary; for without this it is impossible that any number of persons can ever be collected together in one place. Now one day in seven seems to be as proper and convenient a portion of our time to be allotted to this use as any other that can be named. The returns of it are frequent enough to keep alive the sense of religion in our hearts, and distant enough to leave a very sufficient interval for our worldly concerns.

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If then this time was fixed only by the laws, or even by the customs of our country, it would be our duty and our wisdom to comply with it. Considering it merely as an ancient usage, yet if antiquity can render an usage venerable, this must be of all others the most venerable; for it is coeval with the world itself. But it had moreover, as we have seen, the sanction of a divine command. From the very beginning of time God blessed and sanctified the seventh day to the purposes of religion. (Gen. ii. 3.) That injunction was again repeated to the Jews in the most solemn manner at the promulgation of their law from mount Sinai (Exod. xx. 8, 9, 10, 11.), and once more urged upon them by Moses in the words of the text, *Keep the sabbath-day, to sanctify it, as the Lord thy God hath commanded thee.*

After our Lord's resurrection, the first day of the week was, in memory of that great event, substituted in the room of the seventh, and from that time to the present, that is, for almost eighteen hundred years, it has been constantly set apart for the public worship of God by the whole christian world: and, whatever difference of opinion there may have been in other respects, in this all parties, sects, and denominations of christians have universally and invariably agreed. By these means it comes to pass, that on this day many millions of people, in almost every region of the earth, are at one and the same time engaged in prostrating themselves before the throne of grace, and offering up their sacrifice of prayer, praise, and thanksgiving to the common Lord of all, *in whom they live, and move, and have their being.*

There is in this view of the Lord's day something so wonderfully awful and magnificent, that one would think it almost impossible for any man to resist the inclination he must find in himself to join in this general assembly of the human race, *to go with the multitude*, as the psalmist expresses it, *into the house of God*, and to take a part in a solemnity so striking to the imagination, so suitable to the Majesty of heaven, so adapted to the wants, the necessities, the infirmities, the obligations, and the duties of a created and a dependent being.

That they who avow an open contempt of all religion, and profess to live without God in the world, without any belief of his existence, or at least of his providential

superintendence; that these, I say, should think it a very needless waste of time to attend divine service, can be no wonder: but that any person, who calls himself a disciple of Christ, or even a believer in one Supreme Being, should either totally neglect, or but rarely frequent, the public worship of God on that only day which laws both human and divine have appropriated to it, is an instance of contempt for the most sacred and most useful institutions which one should hardly be disposed to credit, if constant and melancholy experience did not too clearly prove the reality of the fact. We see continually that the most trivial pretences of weather, of indisposition, of business, of company, pretences which would not be suffered to interfere one moment with any favourite pursuit or amusement, are thought reasons of sufficient weight to justify us in slighting the express commands, and deserting the service of our Maker and our Redeemer. And it is greatly to be lamented, that these neglects have generally been observed to be most prevalent among those whose education and rank in life should have furnished them with the best principles, and the completest knowledge of their duty; whose example is most open to observation, and has the greatest influence on public manners; whose large proportion of worldly blessings demands a more than ordinary warmth of gratitude to Heaven; and whose situation exposes them to such a variety of trying circumstances, as require a more than ordinary share of divine assistance.

But supposing our attendance on the house of God to be such as it ought, there still remains a question of no small importance: How are we to employ the remaining part of the Lord's day? Are we to dedicate it altogether to private devotion and religious meditation, to seclude ourselves from all society, and to assume an affected gloom of countenance and severity of deportment? or, may we freely give the reins to our inclination for pleasure, and indulge ourselves without reserve in all the usual gaieties and amusements of the other six days in the week? Both these extremes may be seen among different denominations of christians in foreign kingdoms; and they have each, at different periods, been adopted in this. At the beginning of the last century, a book of sports and pastimes for Sundays was set forth,

forth, and recommended to the good people of this land by a prince, (James the First,) who has been sometimes celebrated for his wisdom, but who in this instance certainly was not wise. It gave great, and, it must be owned, just offence to the rising sect of puritans; who, in the next reign, thinking it impossible to recede too much from the former profanations of the Lord's day, ran with too much vehemence into the opposite extreme, and converted the most joyful of all festivals into a day of silent, sullen, austere, reserve, and a rigorous abstinence from every thing that had the smallest tincture of good-humour. When all these extravagancies had subsided, and the constitution, both civil and ecclesiastical, recovered its ancient form, the church of England, with that wisdom and moderation which have generally governed its decisions, took a middle course with respect to the observation of Sunday. In conformity to ancient statutes and usages, it discouraged all public spectacles and diversions, but allowed the more rational pleasures of society, and the cheerfulness of friendly intercourse and conversation; thus drawing the line, with a discreet and a skilful hand, between the two opposite extremes of pharisaical preciseness, and secular dissipation. This prudent medium has now for many years been preserved among us; but how much longer it will be preserved, seems at present no easy matter to say. The licence of the times, however daring in other respects, had hitherto spared the day consecrated to our Maker. But it has now carried its outrages even into that once awful sanctuary. In the very midst of all our dangers and distresses, when it did not seem to be quite the time for setting Heaven at defiance, new invasions of the sabbath have sprung up with surprising effrontery; and we are rapidly departing from that simplicity, sobriety, and purity, in which this holy festival has been delivered down to us by our ancestors. Various places of amusement for the Sunday evening, unknown to former ages, unknown, I believe, to any other christian country, have been openly announced, and, to the disgrace of our religion and our laws, have been as openly frequented*.

* Since this was written, the wisdom of the legislature has, by an express act of Parliament, effectually suppressed these nuisances.

But how can we wonder at these strange extravagancies in the lower classes of the people, when they only improve a little on the liberties taken by too many of their superiors? If they see magnificent gaming-houses erected, and publicly resorted to on the Lord's day; if they see that pernicious amusement admitted on the same day even into private families; if they see numerous and splendid assemblies disturbing the repose, and violating the sanctity of the Sunday evening; what do we think must be the consequence? Is it not apparent that they will learn from their betters the fatal lesson of insulting the most venerable customs of their country, and the most sacred ordinances of Heaven? that they will soon even excel their masters, and carry their contempt of decency far beyond the original examples of it, which made the first impression on their minds?

But apart from these consequences, which are already but too visible, it behoves every man who indulges himself in any unwarrantable freedoms on the Lord's day, to consider very seriously, what spirit he is of, and what the turn of mind must be from whence such conduct springs. If, after having spent six days out of seven in a constant round of amusements, he cannot exist without them even on the seventh, it is high time for him to look to his own heart, to check his greedy appetite for pleasure, and to put himself, without delay, under the direction of higher and better principles. If we cannot give up these follies one day in the week, how shall we bring ourselves to part with them, as at last we must, for ever? Would it not be infinitely more wise and prudent to disentangle ourselves from them by degrees, and to try whether it is not possible to acquire a relish for worthier enjoyments? To assist us in this most useful work, and to put this world, and all its frivolous pursuits, for a few moments out of our thoughts, was one great purpose of the christian sabbath; and it is a purpose for which we of the present times ought to be peculiarly thankful: for a day of rest from diversions is now become as necessary to one part of the world, as a day of rest from labour is to the other. Let us then give ourselves a little respite, a little refreshment from the fatigue of pleasure. Let us not suffer diversions of any kind, much less of a suspicious and a dangerous kind, to intrude on that small portion of time which God has

has appropriated to himself. The whole of it is barely sufficient for the important uses to which it is destined, and to defraud our Maker of any considerable part of it is a species of sacrilege.

But how then (you will say) shall we fill up all those dull tedious hours that are not spent in the public service of the church? How shall we prevent that almost irresistible languor and heaviness which are so apt to take possession of our minds, for want of our usual diversions and occupations on this day?

Surely it can require no great stretch of invention or ingenuity to find out means of employing our vacant time, both innocently and agreeably. Besides the society and conversation of our friends, from which we are by no means precluded, might we not for a few hours find amusement in contemplating the wisdom, the power, the goodness of God in the works of his creation? And might we not draw entertainment, as well as improvement, from some of the sublimer parts of that sacred volume which contains the words of eternal life, and with which therefore it surely concerns us to have some little acquaintance?

Or, if more active recreations are required, what think you of that which you may make as active as you please, and which was in fact the supreme delight of our divine Master, the recreation of doing good? If, for instance, it be at all necessary (and when was it ever more necessary?) to instil into the minds of your children sound principles of virtue and religion; if you have any plans of benevolence to form, any acts of kindness or compassion to execute; if you have committed injuries which ought to be repaired; if you have received injuries which ought to be forgiven; if friends or relations are at variance, whom by a seasonable interposition it would be easy to reconcile; if those you most esteem and love stand in need of advice, of reproof, of assistance, of support; if any occasions, in short, present themselves of convincing the unbeliever, of reclaiming the sinner, of saving the unexperienced, of instructing the ignorant, of encouraging the penitent, of soothing the afflicted, of protecting the oppressed; how can you more profitably, or more delightfully, employ your Sunday leisure, than in the performance of such duties as these; in demonstrating your piety and gratitude to God, by diffusing

joy and comfort to every part you can reach of that creation, which was the work of his hands, and from which he rested on the seventh day?

Occupations like these are in their own nature cheerful and enlivening, infinitely more so than that most gloomy of all amusements, which is too often substituted in their room. They are suited to the character of the day. They partake in some measure of its sanctity. They are (as all the amusements of such a day ought to be) refined, intellectual, spiritual. They fill up, with propriety and consistency, the intervals of divine worship, and, in concurrence with that, will help to draw off our attention a little from the objects that perpetually surround us, to wean us gradually and gently from a scene which we must some time or other quit, to raise our thoughts to higher and nobler contemplations, *to fix our affections on things above*, and thus qualify us for entering into that heavenly sabbath, that everlasting rest, of which the christian sabbath is in some degree an emblem, and for which it was meant to prepare and sanctify our souls.

S E R M O N L.

An immoderate Love of Diversions inconsistent with the Duties of a Christian.

2 TIM. iii. 4.

Lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God.

TO what period of time, and to what particular persons, the sacred writer here alludes, it is neither easy nor material to determine. But there is a question which it is very material, and I doubt but too easy, for most of us to answer; whether the description in the text may not be justly applied to ourselves? In whatever sense we take the word pleasures, whether as denoting those which are in themselves criminal, or those which only become so by excess and abuse; it is surely doing us no injury to say, that we love them more than God. At present I shall confine myself to that sort of pleasures which are usually styled innocent; and in a certain degree, and under proper restrictions, undoubtedly are so; I mean the gaieties and amusements of life. If we are not lovers of these pleasures more than

lovers

lovers of God, if our piety is greater than our dissipation, it must be great indeed. If we served our Maker with half that zeal, half that alacrity and perseverance, with which we pursue our amusements, we should be the most pious nation this day upon earth. But how far this is from being the case, at least with respect to a large proportion of almost every rank of men amongst us, is but too apparent. It is not the living God, it is pleasure that they worship. To this they are idolaters; to this they sacrifice their time, their talents, their fortunes, their health, and too often their innocence and peace of mind. In their haste to enjoy this life, they forget that there is another; they live (as the apostle expresses it) *without God in the world* (Eph. ii. 12.), and their endless engagements not only exclude all love, but all thought of him. However carefully right principles of religion may have been originally planted in their breasts, they have no room to grow up. They are choked with the pleasures of this world, and bring no fruit to perfection. Invention seems to have been tortured to find out new ways of consuming time, and of being uselessly employed. And there has appeared so wonderful an ingenuity in this respect, that it seems almost impossible for the wit of man to invent, or the life of man to admit, any further additions to this kind of luxury. There are thousands, even of those who would take it very ill to be called vicious, who yet from the time of their rising in the morning to the time of their going to rest at night, never once bestow a single thought upon eternity; nor while they riot in the blessings of Providence, vouchsafe to cast one devout look up to the gracious Author of them, in whom *they live, and move, and have their being*. (Acts, xvii. 28.)

Many, I know, would persuade themselves and others, that there can be no harm where there is no actual vice; and that, provided they step not over the bounds of virtue, they cannot be guilty of an excess in pleasure.

But is it true, in the first place, that the man of gaiety never does step over the bounds of virtue? Are all those things which go under the name of amusements as perfectly innocent as they are generally represented to be? Is there not one diversion at least (as it called), and one so predominant in the higher ranks of life, that

it has swallowed up almost every other, which is big with the most fatal mischief? A diversion, which, far different from the common run of amusements, has no foundation in our natural appetites; no charms to captivate the fancy or the understanding; nothing to make glad the heart of man, to give him a cheerful countenance, and refresh him after the cares and fatigues of duty; but runs counter to reason, sense, and nature; defeats all the purposes of amusement; sinks the spirits instead of raising them; sours the temper instead of improving it; and, when it is carried to its utmost lengths, takes such entire and absolute possession of the soul, as to shut out every other concern both for God and man; extinguishes every generous sentiment; excites the most malignant passions; provokes to the most profane expressions; brings distress, sometimes ruin, upon its wretched votaries, their families, friends, and dependents; tempts them to use unfair, or mean, or oppressive methods of retrieving their affairs; and sometimes to conclude the dismal scene by the last fatal act of desperation. I do not say that gaming always produces these effects; or that it is to all persons, in all circumstances, and in all its various degrees, equally pernicious and unlawful; but it has always a natural tendency to these effects, it always exposes ourselves and others to great danger, and can never be ranked among our innocent amusements. Yet as such it is every day more and more pursued; nay, has even appropriated to itself the name of play; for what reason I know not, unless to play with our lives and fortunes, with happiness temporal and eternal, be the most delectable of all human enjoyments.

But putting this strange unaccountable passion out of the question, do not even our most allowable diversions sometimes end in sin, though they may not begin with it? Does not an immoderate fondness for these trivial things insensibly weaken and corrupt our hearts, and lead us by imperceptible steps to a temper of mind, and a course of action, essentially wrong? The fact is, a state of neutrality in religion, an insipid mediocrity between vice and virtue, though it is what many would be glad to take up with, is an imaginary state; at least, is very seldom, if ever, to be found in a life of gaiety and dissipation. The man who is constantly engaged in the amusements, can scarce ever escape the

pollutions of the world. In his eager pursuits of pleasure, he will be sometimes apt to overshoot the mark, and to go further than he ought, perhaps than he intended. Even they who are most in earnest about their future welfare; who have taken care to fortify their minds with the firmest principles of religion; who constantly endeavour to keep alive their hopes and fears of futurity; to guard with the utmost vigilance every avenue of the mind, and secure all *the issues of life* (Proverbs, iv. 23.); even these, I say, are sometimes unable, with all their caution and circumspection, to prevent surprise; with all their strength and resolution to withstand the violence of headstrong passions and desires, which often burst through all restraints, and beat down all the barriers that reason and religion had been a long time raising up against them. What then must be the case when all the impressions of religion are, by the continual attrition of diversions, worn out and effaced; when the mind is stripped of all prudential caution; no guard left upon the imagination; no check upon the passions; the natural spring and vigour of the soul impaired, and no supernatural aid to strengthen and support it? What else can be expected, but that we should fall an easy prey to the weakest invader, and yield ourselves up to the slightest temptation? *When the unclean spirit cometh, he finds every thing within prepared for his reception, empty, swept, and garnished; and he taketh with him seven other spirits more wicked than himself; and they enter in, and dwell there, and the last state of that man is worse than the first* (Matth. xii. 44, 45.); he begins in gaiety and ends in vice.

Let us, however, take this question up on the most favourable grounds: let us allow it possible for you to run round for ever in the circle of gaiety, without ever once striking into the paths of vice: Is this, do you think, sufficient for salvation? If your amusements as effectually choke the good seed as the rankest weeds of vice, can you with any propriety call them innocent? Do you imagine that God, who is a *jealous God* (Exod. xx. 5.), will bear to be supplanted in your affections by every trifle; or that he will be content with your not taking up arms against him, though you do him not one single piece of acceptable service? The utmost you can plead, is a kind of negative merit, the merit of doing neither good nor harm; and what

reception that is likely to meet with, you may judge from the answer given to the unprofitable servant, who produced his talent wrapt up in a napkin, undiminished indeed, but unimproved: *O thou wicked servant, wherefore gavest thou not my money into the bank, that at my coming I might have required mine own with usury?* (Luke, xix. 23.) It is not enough merely to abstain from gross crimes; it is not enough to enjoy yourselves in an indolent harmless tranquillity; to divide matters so nicely as to avoid equally the inconveniencies of vice, and the fatigues of virtue; to praise religion in words, to love it perhaps in speculation, but to leave the trouble of practising it to others. This languor and inactivity is a kind of lethargy in the soul, which renders it utterly insensible to the life and spirit of religion. Indifference in any good cause is blamable. In religion, in the christian religion, it is insupportable. It does violence to the first and fundamental principle of that religion: *Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, with all thy soul, with all thy mind, and with all thy strength.* (Mark, xii. 30.) Go now and let your whole heart, and soul, and mind, and strength, be engaged in pursuing your amusements, and promoting your pleasures, and then lay claim to the rewards of christianity.

Happy will it be for you, if you can escape its punishments. The gospel, I am sure, gives you no grounds to suppose that you shall. Though you bear no evil fruit, yet if you bear no good, you are involved in the sentence of the fig-tree, *Cut it down, why cumbereth it the ground?* (Luke, xiii. 7.) To do nothing is in many cases to do a positive wrong, and as such requires a positive punishment. To stand neuter in dangerous commotions of the state, the great Athenian lawgiver declared to be a crime against the state; and in like manner the great christian lawgiver declares; *he that is not with me, is against me; and he that gathereth not with me, scattereth abroad.* (Matth. xii. 30.)

Christianity is throughout an active religion; it consists not only in *abstaining from all appearance of evil* (1 Thess. v. 22.); but in *being ready to every good work* (Tit. iii. 1.); and if we stop short at the first, we leave the better half of our business undone. Christ himself *went about continually doing good* (Acts, x. 38.); and he has prescribed a variety of positive

positive and practical duties to his disciples, as the condition of their salvation; and pressed the performance of these duties upon them with an earnestness and a force of expression that may well alarm the thoughtless and the gay, and make them reflect on the extreme danger of their situation. With regard to God, we are commanded *to believe in him, to fear him, to love him, to worship him, to give him thanks always, to pray without ceasing, and watch thereunto with all perseverance.* With regard to our neighbour, we are *to do good unto all men, to be rich in good works, to be kind and tender-hearted, to feed the hungry, to clothe the naked, to remember them that are in bonds, to minister to the sick, to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction.* With regard to ourselves, we are enjoined *to be temperate in all things, to keep under our bodies, and bring them into subjection, to set our affections on things above, to watch and pray lest we enter into temptation, to work out our salvation with fear and trembling, to use all diligence to make our calling and election sure.* Such and so various are the duties pressed upon us in every page of the scriptures. And is this now a religion to be trifled with? Is it not enough to employ every moment we can spare from the indispensable duties of our station, and the necessary refreshments of nature; and how then can it be consistent with that incessant hurry and dissipation, which, intent only on providing a succession of worthless amusements and ignoble gratifications, overlooks every obligation of a man and a christian; and supposes that the whole business of life is not to employ time usefully, but to consume it insignificantly? Can these men seriously imagine that they are all this time *working out their salvation*; that they are *pressing forwards towards the mark for the prize of their high calling* (Phil. iii. 14.); that they are every day drawing nearer and nearer to immortal happiness; and that they shall share the crown of glory with them who *have borne the burthen and heat of the day*? (Matth. xx. 12.) Is eternal life so very small an object, so extremely cheap a purchase, as to require not the least pains to obtain it? Or is the situation of the rich man represented in scripture to be so perfectly safe and secure, that, while the rest of mankind are enduring afflictions, struggling with difficulties, subduing their passions,

and *working out their salvation with fear and trembling*; he, and he only, may neglect all these precautions, may give up his whole time and thoughts to dress, and magnificence, and diversion, and good cheer; may center his whole care in his own dear person, and make it his sole study to gratify every wish of his heart; may leave his salvation to take care of itself, and, as if he had obtained a promise of heaven in reversion, think of nothing but present felicity, and say within himself, *Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years, take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry?* (Luke, xii. 19.) Be not deceived: this is not virtue; this is not religion; this is not christianity. It is, on the contrary, that very temper of mind, that indolent, soft, luxurious dream of the soul, for which the rich man in the gospel was condemned *to lift up his eyes in torments* (Luke, xvi. 23.); and let those who dread his punishment, be warned by his example.

It is then a fatal mistake to suppose, that a life of continual gaiety and dissipation, because it is not marked with any notorious crimes, because it does not shock our consciences with palpable guilt, is therefore perfectly innocent. You have by this time seen, I hope, that it is far from being so. You have seen that it naturally leads to, and frequently terminates in, actual vice; that at the least it so totally unmans and enfeebles the soul, as to render it unfit for the reception of religious truths, incapable of exerting its nobler powers, unable to struggle through the common difficulties, or support the common afflictions, of life; and leaves neither time, nor inclination, nor ability, to perform the most important duties of a man, a social being, and a christian.

The truth is, although diversions may serve very well to quicken a palled appetite, they are much too poignant and high-seasoned to be the constant food and nourishment of the soul. They not only destroy our relish for the more plain and simple fare of sobriety and virtue, but lay a foundation for the worst diseases; and though they do not so instantly kill as the deadly poison of vice, yet with a gradual and a fatal certainty, they undermine the vital parts, and sap the constitution.

Beware then of an error, which is the more dangerous, because it is not always perceived,

perceived, or at least acknowledged, to be an error. And such of you, more especially as are just setting out in life, full of those high spirits and gay imaginations which youth, and rank, and affluence, naturally inspire; beware of giving way to that feverish thirst of pleasure, to that frivolous turn of mind and levity of conduct, which will render all your great advantages useless, and totally defeat every grand purpose of your creation. Do not imagine that you were born to please yourselves only. Do not entertain that false, that destructive notion, that your wealth and time are all your own; that you may dispose of them exactly as you think fit; may lavish the whole of them on your own pleasures and amusements, without being accountable to any one for the application. There is one, most assuredly, who may, and who has declared that he will, call you to an account, for the use of that leisure and those riches which he bestowed upon you for far other purposes than that mean ignoble one of mere selfish gratification. There are duties of the last importance owing to your families, your friends, your country, your fellow-creatures, your Creator, which you are bound under the most sacred ties to perform; and whatever calls off your attention from these, does from that moment cease to be innocent. Here then is the precise point at which you ought to stop. You may be lovers of pleasure; it is natural, it is reasonable, for you to be so; but you must not be lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God. This is the true line that separates harmless gaiety from criminal dissipation. It is a line drawn by the hand of God himself, and he will never suffer it to be passed with impunity. He claims, on the justest grounds, the first place in your hearts. His laws and precepts are to be the first object of your regard. And be assured, that by suffering them to be so, you will be no losers even in present felicity. It is a truth demonstrable by reason, and confirmed by invariable experience, that a perpetual round of fashionable gaiety, is not the road to real substantial happiness. Ask those who have tried it, and they will all (if they are honest) with one voice declare, that it is not. It is indeed in the very nature of things impossible that it should be so. This world is not calculated to afford, the human mind is not

formed to bear, a constant succession of new and exquisite delights. To aim therefore at uninterrupted, unbounded gaiety, to make pleasure so necessary to your existence, that you cannot subsist one moment without it, is to convert every thing that is not absolute pleasure into absolute pain, and to lay the foundation of certain misery. Diversions are of too thin and unsubstantial a nature to fill the whole capacity of a rational mind, or to satisfy the cravings of a soul formed for immortality. They must, they do, tire and disgust; you see it every day; you see men flying from one amusement to another; affecting to be happy, yet feeling themselves miserable; fatigued with pursuing their pleasures, yet uneasy without them; growing sick at last of them all, of themselves, and every thing around them; and compelled perhaps at last to have recourse to solitude, without the least provision made for it; without any fund of entertainment within, to render it supportable. From this wretched state it is that religion would preserve you, and the very worst you have to fear from it, is nothing more than such gentle restraints on your gaiety, as tend to promote the very end you have in view, the true enjoyment even of the present life. Suffer it then to do you this kind office; and do not look on christianity in that gloomy light, in which it sometimes perhaps appears to you. Far from being an enemy to cheerfulness, it is the truest friend to it. That sober and temperate use of diversions, which it allows and recommends, is the surest way to preserve their power to please, and your capacity to enjoy them. At the same time, though it forbids excess in our pleasures, yet it multiplies the number of them; and disposes the mind to receive entertainment from a variety of objects and pursuits, which to the gay part of mankind are absolutely flat and insipid. To a body in perfect health the plainest food is relishing, and to a soul rightly harmonized by religion every thing affords delight. Rural retirement, domestic tranquillity, friendly conversation, literary pursuits, philosophical inquiries, works of genius and imagination; nay even the silent beauties of unadorned nature, a bright day, a still evening, a starry hemisphere, are sources of unadulterated pleasure to those whose taste is not vitiated by criminal indulgences,

gences, or debased by trifling ones. And when from these you rise to the still more rational and manly delights of virtue; to that self-congratulation which springs up in the soul from the consciousness of having used your best endeavours to act up to the precepts of the gospel; of having done your utmost, with the help of divine grace, to correct your infirmities, to subdue your passions, to improve your understandings, to exalt and purify your affections, to promote the welfare of all within your reach, to love and obey your Maker and your Redeemer: then is human happiness wound up to its utmost pitch; and this world has no higher gratifications to give.

Try then, you, who are in search of pleasures, try these among the rest; try, above all others, the pleasures of devotion. Think not that they are nothing more than the visions of a heated imagination. They are real, they are exquisite. They are what thousands have experienced, what thousands still experience, what you yourselves may experience if you please. Acquire only a taste for devotion (as you often do for other things of far less value) in the beginning of life, and it will be your support and comfort through the whole extent of it. It will raise you above all low cares, and little gratifications; it will give dignity and sublimity to your sentiments, inspire you with fortitude in danger, with patience in adversity, with moderation in prosperity, with alacrity in all your undertakings, with watchfulness over your own conduct, with benevolence to all mankind. It will be so far from throwing a damp on your other pleasures, that it will give new life and spirit to them, and make all nature look gay around you. It will be a fresh fund of cheerfulness in store for you, when the vivacity of youth begins to droop; and is the only thing that can fill up that void in the soul, which is left in it by every earthly enjoyment. It will not, like worldly pleasures, desert you, when you have most need of consolation, in the hours of solitude, of sickness, of old age; but when once its holy flame is thoroughly lighted up in your breasts, instead of becoming more faint and languid as you advance in years, it will grow brighter and stronger every day; will glow with peculiar warmth and lustre, when your dissolution draws near; will dispel the gloom and horrors of a death-

bed; will give you a foretaste, and render you worthy to partake of that fullness of joy, those pure celestial pleasures which are at *God's right hand for evermore.* (Psal. xvi. 11.)

S E R M O N LI.

By ARCHBISHOP SECKER.

Avoid Communication with the unfruitful Works of Darkness.

EPH. V. 11.

And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them.

IF the practice of their duty were general amongst men, it would appear to all of us as we come forward into life, notwithstanding our present proneness to sinful indulgences, extremely natural and easy. For as its reasonableness always recommends it to our understandings, and its amiableness to our affections, when unbiassed, so, in these circumstances, the public example of goodness would engage our imitation, the universal esteem of it excite our ambition, and its beneficial consequences plainly shew it to be our true present interest. Allurements to unlawful pleasures would then be comparatively few; provocations to mutual injuries none; consciousness of right behaviour would make men pleased with themselves; reciprocal acts of justice and kindness would make them happy in each other; and experience, that their being was a blessing to them, would produce in their souls affectionate sentiments of reverential gratitude to the bountiful Author of it. Such we should have found the world, if sin had not entered into it; and such we might still in a good measure bring it to be, if we would; if most of us did not, besides filling our own lives with guilt and misery, contribute, by a variety of wrong behaviour, to render our fellow-creatures also wicked and wretched. This we all see and feel to be the real state of things; but how do we act upon it? We complain grievously of each other, for the faults which we each of us go on to commit; we complain even of Providence, because the word is—only what we have made it; and allege the misconduct of our neighbours for a defence of our own, instead

of trying to mend ourselves or them; whereas, evidently our concern is, to *have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them*; to preserve our own souls from the epidemic distemper, and warn those around us of the danger of being infected. But it is with the security of our personal innocence, that we are to begin; without which we shall seldom in earnest attempt, and scarce ever successfully prosecute the reformation of any one else; nor will the greatest success in such endeavours avail us; if, as our apostle expresses it, *when we have preached to others, we ourselves are cast-aways.* (1 Cor. ix. 27.)

The first and principal consideration then is, how to avoid any *fellowship with the unfruitful*, a gentle term, which means pernicious, *works of darkness*. Now a main point of caution against all sorts of peril is, to know from whence chiefly we are to apprehend it. But who can say, from what quarter our virtue runs the greatest risque, in a world so thick set round with various temptations; where all vices are so common, that it seems a matter of course, and almost of necessity, to indulge one or another; and the majority of the guilty is so large, that each considers himself, in some degree, as safe in the crowd even from divine displeasure, *numbering himself amongst the multitude of sinners, and not remembering that wrath will not tarry long* (Ecclus. vii. 16.); where our eyes and our ears continually present to our imaginations crimes, of which else we should never have thought, and suggest easy methods of attaining what we believed to be as impracticable, as we know it to be unlawful; where the prosperity of ill men so strongly prompts us to envy their condition, imitate their presumptuousness, and doubt of a superintending power; where every natural inclination that we have, meets with something to inflame it beyond bounds, or turn it aside from its proper object; where fear of inconveniencies threatening upright conduct, and hope of gaining advantages by deviations from it, work within us continually; where injuries, real or fancied, are daily provoking us to injure or hate in return; and even friendship and kind affection, meeting too often with undeserving objects, make us partial and unfair, subservient to the purposes of the

bad or injudicious; and criminally negligent of the merits of the worthy?

Here is already an alarming list of dangers; and yet one source of them remains unmentioned, so very fruitful, that probably it brings more of us to ruin than all the rest: I mean, our strong tendency to follow whatever precedents are set us; which being the great seducer of mankind to *have fellowship with one another in the unfruitful works of darkness*, I shall confine myself to the consideration of it in the sequel of this discourse.

A disposition to fall in with what we see others do, is one of the earliest natural principles that we exert; and in itself a very beneficial one. For by means of it we learn, with ease and pleasure, a multitude of things necessary or serviceable in life; conform readily to the inclinations of those about us in a thousand matters of indifference, and from mutual likeness become mutually agreeable. By the same means also, were patterns of piety and virtue more frequent, or we more attentive to them, we might be excited; as undoubtedly it was designed we should; to copy, and even rival each other's laudable qualities. But where things are capable of contrary uses, we generally make the worst of them; and in no case more than this. The example of evil, in a corrupted world, is by much the oftenest in our view; which the weak and indolent imitate without reflection; the good-humoured and pliable are drawn after them by the desire of pleasing, though in wrong ways; the vain and ambitious by fondness of excelling; though in culpable attainments; and almost all, by the shame of singularity and dread of ridicule; till the numbers of the faulty being thus become abundantly sufficient to keep one another in countenance, custom refuses to let its authority be any longer examined; and sets up itself as the sole rule of conduct.

For, even when we seem to act the most entirely from opinions and dispositions of our own; these, upon inquiry, will be frequently found to derive, if not their original, at least a great part of their strength, from the deference that we pay to the notions and practice of the world. Thus men speak and think slightly of religion, often without imagining they know any objection of weight against it; and yet how they can have the very lowest degree of belief in it, and not believe it to be an affair

affair of the utmost importance, is quite inconceivable: but notwithstanding, they treat it without scruple, as a slight matter, because they see it commonly treated so. But this degree of depravity is not universal. We, perhaps, may blame those who do so, and with marks of great seriousness profess ourselves christians; yet, it may be, are easy in transgressing, in a higher degree or a lower, as occasion offers, almost every precept of christianity, because others, who call themselves christians also, do the same thing. We acknowledge that we are soon to leave this earth, and give an account to God of the part which we have acted upon it; yet perceiving that most people about us overlook these awful truths, we can do so too, as absolutely, as if we had no concern in them. And, to be a little more particular, what is it that makes us in our common discourse so regardless of equity and humanity, so eager to speak evil and propagate scandal? Surely not always malignity of heart; and certainly very seldom any peculiar knowledge of the case, or interest in it. But such is the reigning turn of conversation, which we are wicked and weak enough to adopt and promote, at the very time that we inveigh bitterly against it, and suffer grievously by it. Again: How many there are who trifle away their days in thinking of and doing nothing that tends to any good purpose, only because such trifling is fashionable! How many affect follies and vices, to which, at the bottom, they have little or no liking, which are highly prejudicial, and will probably be fatal to them, merely because they are in vogue; and for no wiser a reason will persevere in them, when nature cries aloud to have them left off! How many distress and undo themselves and their families, by imprudently vying with the luxury and expensiveness of those about them, nay, of those above them! And, in general, from what is it else, than taking it on trust from common persuasion, that possessing the things of this world is happiness; though we not only may observe the contrary in all whom we know, but feel it in ourselves; that we pursue them through sins and through sufferings of all kinds, and admire and detest one another on account of them, at the rate we do? What, indeed, else could support the absurdity of seeking our chief good where plainly it is not, but that

we all see one another do so, and will persuade ourselves, against the fullest evidence, that so universal an attachment must be well grounded?

But the example of a small part of mankind is often sufficient to lead us into strange errors. Where party-zeal of any kind prevails, into what monstrous opinions of men and things, what utter disregard to all truth and justice, to public spirit and humanity, will men run one after another! Indeed they will do things, when united in bodies, which, taken singly, they would abhor; nay, will think they justify their own behaviour completely, by alleging only, that it is the same with that of their opposers, whom they condemn as the worst of men. Sometimes a less authority than this proves able to misguide us; and a blind prepossession in favour of a few persons, or a single one, shall seduce us into a very unjustifiable imitation, and even make us, by the meanness of it, contemptible, or, by carrying it too far, guilty, when what we meant to copy was commendable, or, however, innocent.

Without specifying more instances, or enlarging on these, the mischiefs of being injudiciously *conformed to this world* (Rom. xii. 2.) appear so considerable, as to make the remedies which can be found for it extremely desirable. Now, remedies of mischiefs vary with their causes; which in this case are numerous.

1. Some follow the multitude to do evil (Exod. xxiii. 2.) from mere inconsiderateness: poor creatures, greatly to be pitied, and yet severely reprov'd. For, surely, enough depends on our chusing right in life, to make us think about it; and there is appearance enough of errors in the common practice, to give us no little diffidence in a matter of such moment. But mankind in general being thoughtless, each individual, as he goes on with the rest, finding few or none different from himself to compare with, is hardly sensible of his own being so. Yet would we, in imagination, step out of the present scene of things for a while, consider ourselves as mere spectators, and view the course of them as they pass before us, how amazing would the sight be! The plain and only way to happiness, through the faithful cultivation of piety and virtue, almost unanimously neglected; nations and ages treading, in mutual implicit reliance, paths

leading to destruction; the less faulty surprisingly apt to be dissipated in a hurry of amusements, or plod on in worldly business without higher attentions; the rest, by irregular passions, and unlawful pursuits, making themselves and their neighbours as wretched at present as they well can, and at the same time providing for unspeakably greater misery hereafter; every generation reminded, every single person seeing, on one occasion or another, in how wrong a course they are; yet shutting their eyes again, and going forward blindfold; none almost taking warning by the fate of his predecessors, but each leaving, in his turn, an useless admonition of his own to such as come in his stead. *This their way is their folly: yet their posterity approve their sayings.* (Psal. xlix. 13.) And shall we be of the number of those who act thus; or rather assert our right to judge for ourselves, where it concerns us so nearly? Such is the usage of the world; but is it the dictate of conscience, is it the road to happiness? The multitude, *blind leaders of the blind* (Matth. xv. 14.), have they reason, have they scripture, have they the final event of things, to justify them? If not, let us choose a safer guidance, and apply the real rule of life to direct our steps; ask ourselves often, what we are doing, and what it tends to? Stop short, wherever we discern ground for suspicion; beware of plausible pleas, for they often colour over the worst actions; beware of indiscreet compliances, for they border nearly upon criminal ones; and ever remember the son of Sirach's advice: *Go not in a way, wherein thou mayest fall. Be not confident in a plain way.* (Ecclus. xxxii. 21, 22.) But above all, let us beware of ourselves; and recollecting, as we have but too much cause, our natural supineness and forgetfulness of the cautions that we so often receive, *give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we let them slip* (Heb. ii. 1.); and *set our hearts unto the words of God's law, for it is not a vain thing for us, because it is our life.* (Deut. xxxii. 46, 47.)

2. Others there are, not absolutely thoughtless about their conduct, but distrustful of their own judgment; borne down by so great an authority, as the practice of all mankind appears to be, against seriousness in religion and strictness in virtue. But, universal as this practice

may seem, there are many exceptions from it amongst all ranks; and some, God be praised, in the highest, of exemplary christians, who, *in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, shine as lights in the world.* (Phil. ii. 15.) But were the apostacy more general than it is, yet being the effect of mere inconsiderateness or ungoverned passions, what weight can there be in the most perfect agreement of persons thus influenced? Or if still the multitude together look formidable, separate them; and consider singly, of whom the whole is composed. The much larger part will be acknowledged at first sight to be such, as we should be ashamed once to think of taking for our directors, in a point of any consequence. And for the rest: the rich and great are rather peculiarly exposed to temptation, and, of course, to fall, than qualified to discover and relish those momentous truths and rules of life, which humility and retirement into ourselves best dispose us to receive. The learned and knowing are liable to be misled into wrong judgments by the vanity of judging differently from common men; nor do they always act agreeably to what they inwardly think. And the reputed wise and able very frequently have never considered in earnest what the true wisdom of life is, but only busied themselves with a silly cunning to attain what they have rashly and falsely taken for the end, at which they were to aim.

But further: This universal consent, pleaded against observing the precepts of religion, is, when examined, no consent at all. For as the vices of men are contrary to each other, and every vicious temper is full of inconsistencies within itself, no one immoral course will ever be generally approved, nor almost any one immoral person continue long of the same opinion. The only thing in which we shall find them agree, is, that, which they all by turns own, that the conduct of the virtuous is right, and their own wrong. Here, therefore, a pious and discreet man will easily raise an intestine war amongst the enemy; defend himself against one side by the authority of the other; indeed against all sides by the authority of all; and in conclusion resolve, flighting and pitying a divided giddy crowd, *in every good work to trust his own soul; for this is the keeping of the commandment.* (Ecclus. xxxii. 23.)

3. Another

3. Another strong inducement to have fellowship with the bad customs of the world is, desire of being esteemed by it. But do the vicious really esteem one another? Do they not almost always hate or despise one another? Or suppose that, for joining in their sins and absurdities, you were sure to receive their applause as your reward. Perhaps the whole meaning of it is at the bottom no more than this: they want to keep themselves in countenance, being conscious that they have occasion for it, by adding as many as they can to their number; and their good opinion of you is thinking you weak enough to be drawn in for one. Or perhaps the superiority which your innocence gives you over them, is painful to them, and they would fain bring you down to their own level. Or they have some interested design upon you, or they consider you as an instrument fitted to amuse and entertain them; and so extol you, while they deride you. This, you see, is not being admired; it is being made a tool. But were it otherwise, consider a little; what can such admiration be worth? How long will it be likely to last? And what must the consequences prove, now and to eternity? Why then, instead of courting outward regard from those who inwardly condemn themselves, do you not choose to be respected by the wise and good, to enjoy the testimony of your own conscience, and to secure the important approbation of him who hath said, *Them that honour me, I will honour: and they that despise me, shall be lightly esteemed?* (1 Sam. ii. 30.)

4. A further motive, which yet more powerfully inclines too many to unlawful compliances, is, false good-nature and shame. They have so excessive a flexibility of temper, that they know not how to stand out against what the practice of the world recommends, and especially what their acquaintance invite and press them to, though they ever so clearly see the impropriety of it, and have ever so firmly resolved the contrary. Unhappy creatures, betrayed by dispositions, almost virtuous, into vice! The truly good-natured part, would they but reflect, is to lead others in the right way, not to follow them in the wrong; the truly shameful behaviour, not to be resolute, obstinate, if tempters please to call it so, in consulting our present and future welfare. *Beware of evil,* saith the son of Sirach,

and be not ashamed when it concerneth thy soul. For there is a shame that bringeth sin; and there is a shame which is glory and grace. Accept no person against thy soul; and let not the reverence of any man cause thee to fall. (Ecclus. iv. 20, 21, 22.) *There is, that destroyeth his own soul through baseness, and by accepting of persons overthroweth himself.* (Ecclus. xx. 22.) But they who have the misfortune to be of this make, should by no means trust to their own most solemn purposes, or even vows. Their chief safety is in flight; in avoiding, to their utmost, such company and such things, though ever so agreeable, as may endanger their innocence; and keeping at a distance from temptation, till they can bear it better. Thus they will escape at once the uneasiness of resisting and the hazard of yielding, and increase their strength gradually by a cautious exercise of it, provided they rest not in human means only, but with faith and humility unfeigned, apply for and depend on the divine assistance, promised through Jesus Christ; the necessity of which for every person in every case, we presume you always understand, and for that sole reason we do not always express it.

5. With this inward weakness is commonly joined an apprehension of difficulties from without: of public dislike and censure for condemning the public taste by a different conduct, or at least of much ridicule, a thing full as hard to be borne, for doing conscientiously what the world despises, and abstaining from what it doth without scruple. But let not the danger of censure appear to any one so frightful. Indeed, if persons take absurd or indifferent observances to be great duties, if they are strict in the performance of one duty, and grossly negligent of others; or if to the performance of many there be added either a vain desire of making their own goodness remarkable, or the provoking sin of uncharitableness towards others, they must not expect very favourable treatment. But an uniformly good christian without superstition, without affectation, and without sourness, which are surely none of them virtues, may live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world (Tit. ii. 12.), bad as it is, ever so long, without any great danger either of making himself enemies by doing no harm and as much good as he can, or of falling

into contempt for acting only as every man in his heart knows he himself ought to act. But if ever this prove otherwise, instead of being *shaken in our minds* (2 Theff. ii. 2.) by it, let us consider how much more censure we should incur and deserve by a vicious life, to say nothing of other inconveniencies; and above all, let us consider that infinitely more important censure which both we and our scorers are shortly to undergo; and since, as St. Peter argues, they who *think it strange, that we run not with them to the same excess of riot, speaking evil of us, shall give account to him that is ready to judge the quick and the dead; let us arm ourselves with this mind, that we live not our time in the flesh to the lusts of men, but to the will of God.* (1 Pet. iv. 1, 2, 4, 5.)

As for the ridicule which ludicrous scoffers love to throw upon religion, we may avoid much of it by prudence, and despise the rest with ease. It falls heaviest on the pretences to piety made by the vicious, and we shall seldom be thought such, if we are not; or on the reservedness and formality of some who are good. Now, indeed, it is never advisable to go to the utmost lengths of what may, strictly speaking, be just lawful, they adjoin so very closely on what is forbidden; yet there is a contrary extreme, an immoderate suspiciousness of innocent compliances. And they who indulge it lay a heavier burthen on themselves than they need, perhaps than they will support without sinking under it. But at least they rob their own minds of that serenity and cheerfulness which they might and ought to have enjoyed; they disguise religion under a gloomy uninviting appearance, which is great pity; and furnish the profane with a grievous handle for exposing both them and it; till perhaps they at length grow ashamed of their profession, and make a sudden exchange of their excessive rigour for the worse errors of libertinism and infidelity. Therefore, in a moderate degree, on proper occasions, let us not be backward to bear a part in such customs of the world, as we are sure we safely may, and let it, if possible, be a graceful one. On the other hand, whatever, though harmless in itself, may be a snare to us, or by our means to others, let us abstain from it indeed resolutely, but abstain with an easy air and manner; keep our reasons to ourselves, rather than

be eager to mention them; or mention them if it may do good, without exaggerating or insisting too vehemently upon any thing; but so as may best convince men of the solidity of our judgment, and reasonableness of our conduct. Behaving thus, we may well hope to become objects, at least after a while, of respect instead of derision, to which no part of genuine piety is on any account liable. And they who set themselves to make a jest of it, might without difficulty, if the seriousness of their case, and sometimes pity, sometimes just indignation, did not prevent it, have that weapon turned upon them, and be proved the most absurd of all human beings. Their scrupulousness of admitting the most indubitable truths of religion, and readiness at the same time to acquiesce in the wildest imaginations that are unfavourable to it; their schemes of making themselves easy by counteracting the dictates of their own consciences, and happy by transgressing the laws of infinite wisdom and goodness, enforced by almighty power; their delight in the hopes of existing no longer than the space of this transitory life, and their haste to ruin health, fortune, and reputation, all that can afford them enjoyment in the very beginning of life; their earnest pursuits of what they frequently despise at the time, and almost always nauseate soon after they have attained it; and the tormenting inward conflicts that they often experience between two passions, both of them perhaps foolish, and both pernicious, which shall be preferred; surely these things, and above all their triumphing in the wisdom of these things, and insulting those who are stupid enough to follow the rules of plain reason, and the directions of God himself from heaven, as the best guides to their present and future well-being, might without any great effort be so described, as to retort on their own heads a double share of the contempt which they are so liberal in throwing about them. But however unwilling or unfit a wise man may be to *answer fools according to their folly* (Prov. xxvi. 4, 5.), at least he will see it to be unworthy of his notice; and go on, unconcerned, through the impotent attacks of it, in the steady practice of *whatsoever things are true and honest, whatsoever things are lovely and of good report*; (Phil. iv. 8.) recollecting daily that awful

and

and repeated declaration of the holy Jesus, *Whosoever shall be ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him also shall the Son of Man be ashamed when he cometh in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.* (Mark, viii. 38.) *Then shall the righteous man* (as the Book of Wisdom beautifully expresses it) *stand in great boldness before the face of such as made no account of his labours. And they, repenting and groaning for anguish of spirit, shall say within themselves, this was he whom we had some time in derision, and a proverb of reproach. We fools accounted his life madness, and his end to be without honour. How is he numbered among the children of God, and his lot is amongst the saints! Therefore have we erred from the way of truth, and wearied ourselves in the way of wickedness and destruction. What hath our pride profited us, and what good hath our vaunting brought us? All those things are passed away like a shadow; and as the dust that is blown away with the wind. But the righteous live for evermore: their reward also is with the Lord, and the care of them is with the Most High.* (Wisd. v.)

S E R M O N LII.

The same Subject continued.

EPH. v. 11.

And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them.

THE prevalence of impiety and immorality in the world, hath not only made the original duties of mankind more difficult by increasing the temptations to transgress them, but added to their number many new obligations of great importance, relating partly to the concern of preserving ourselves, partly to the charity of guarding others, from the general infection. Our own preservation is doubtless to be the first object of our attention, as we are primarily intrusted with and answerable for our own persons, and have by nature the strongest solicitude for our own happiness. But zeal for that of our fellow-creatures ought certainly to fill the second place in our breasts, and is a duty much too little regarded even by the good, considering how indispensably both religion and humanity, and indeed our common interest, require us to promote what is right and fit, and restrain each other from sin and ruin, by all such me-

thods as we properly can. For every one is by no means qualified to use every method; and therefore, without prudent reflection, many may both labour and suffer much, without any prospect of its turning to account; nay, may involve themselves in guilt by immoderate eagerness to reform their neighbours. But, though all must consult their own strength and opportunities, and leave to those who are better able, and to the providence of God, what they find themselves unequal to; there still remains to every one of us a proper share of this great work, and we ought to be faithfully diligent within the sphere of our influence, be it larger or smaller, to discountenance wickedness and encourage piety and virtue, by all those ways to which God, having adapted our powers and circumstances, hath consequently called us. And as these vary greatly, so the apostle hath given room in the text for treating of them all, by mentioning the lowest instance of due care in this respect, *having no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness; and the highest, reprovng them.*

I. The first of these, barely not partaking in the bad actions that others commit, may seem perhaps to be scarce doing any thing for the opposite cause. And yet, as the common practice of sin is the principal plea in its favour, it is of great consequence to shew, that the practice is not universal; that there are still persons left who fear God and love his laws, who abhor an unworthy deed, and despise a criminal pleasure. The profligate, sensible that a virtuous character is the superior one in speculation, have nothing left but to question the reality of it in fact, and by reflecting very little, and conversing with such only, or chiefly, as are like themselves, they become by degrees almost persuaded that all men are wicked, and cannot be otherwise. This opinion extinguishes modesty as well as deadens conscience; they triumph in their imaginary discovery, degrading as it is to human nature, and insult the vanity of those who presume to think themselves moral agents. It is lamentable to observe, how far they have succeeded in their monstrous attempt to pervert the true order of things. While they *glory in their shame* (Phil. iii. 19.), too many grow ashamed of what they ought to account their glory; would wish to have their performance-

performance of religious duties and the regularity of their lives unknown or disbelieved, or ascribed to some other motive than principle; or it may be, a few fashionable sins imputed to them to save their reputations. By the influence of such preposterous bashfulness, they often become at length what they desire to seem; at least they suffer others to fall, whom the authority of their example might have supported, and confirm the profane and vicious in their wrong notions and courses. Another inducement besides cowardice to this improper conduct, is an abhorrence of being thought ostentatious; which hath the more weight, because in all matters, and especially in religion, whoever takes uncommon pains to make a shew, will be suspected of not having much reality. But if affectation on that hand be a fault, affectation on the other is a greater, and the plain rule of behaviour lies between them; that every christian go through his christian duty with uprightness and simplicity; neither desiring to bring the private parts of it into public view, nor labouring to make a secret of his faith and practice in cases where they would of course be seen. A natural artless procedure will as certainly vindicate itself, as dishonest contrivances will be detected. And therefore let no one fear to be thought, or when occasion requires, to let all mankind perceive that he is rightly thought, religious and conscientious. The regulation of our appetites and passions, by reason and good sense, can never be a ground of contempt. Doing justice and loving mercy, is honoured throughout the earth. And though it should be added of the same person who lives by these rules, that he also *walks humbly with his God* (Mic. vi. 8.); one doth not discern why that should lessen the good opinion pre-conceived of him, or how those who every day with abject servility are worshipping others no better than themselves, for trifling interests, can pretend to think it meanness in him that he honours and adores the Maker and Judge of all. Nay, let it be said further, that he adores him suitably to the directions laid down in scripture; and conscious of his own ignorance, guilt, and weakness, is willing thankfully to accept instruction, pardon, assistance, and eternal life, the free gifts of his heavenly Father, on the giver's terms, through faith in the

merits of Jesus Christ, and the grace of the holy spirit; still who hath a right to blame him, unless he can prove, which no one ever hath done or will, that this is not the way to happiness here and hereafter, and that any other is? A virtuous, a religious, a christian character, then, as it always deserves, will generally command respect; its amiableness, its importance to public, to private welfare, will be visible. And, in proportion as numbers appear possessed of it, the vicious will be awed into silence, and the modester part of them at least into outward imitation, which may produce in time, through God's grace, inward seriousness. But, however these may be affected, all the well inclined will rejoice in the protection, and improve by the example, of such declared friends. Almost every one may do some good in this way, and possibly far more than he imagines, merely by maintaining openly an uniform tenor of pious and moral behaviour, without taking any pains to call the attention of mankind to it. But the rich, the noble, the powerful, the learned, the ingenious, the admired, those especially in whom several of these advantages are united, may, barely by manifesting themselves to be such as they ought, each of them singly reform or preserve multitudes of their inferiors; and a number of them combined, oppose and put to flight the reigning vices of the whole age in which they live.

Hence it is, that our Saviour hath laid so great a stress on the duty of *confessing him before men* (Matth. x. 32.); and exhorted his disciples thus; *Ye are the light of the world; let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.* (Matth. v. 14. 16.) Hence also St. Paul, alluding probably to the expressions of his master, though not present when they were used, saith of those who are *blameless and blemishless, the sons of God, without rebuke, that they shine in the midst of others as lights in the world, holding forth the word of life.* (Phil. ii. 15, 16.)

II. After exhibiting a pattern of goodness in ourselves, our next care should be to promote in a proper manner, on all fit occasions, the esteem of whatever is good in others. The generality attend not enough to moral excellencies, and too often consider them in a wrong point of view; by which means they overlook.

or sometimes conceive prejudices against what they would else honour, and be proud to imitate. Therefore, whenever favourable opportunities present themselves, they should be instantly seized; and the rightness, the loveliness, the beneficial fruits of each virtue, shewn to such as are not yet sufficiently sensible of them; the ridicule which hath been unjustly thrown on some duties taken off, and the misrepresentations which have rendered them contemptible, rectified; the plea of excessive severity urged against others, confuted; and the real difficulty of practising them proved to be eligible by the shortness of its continuance, and the blessed effects of overcoming it. At the same time we should exemplify these truths whenever we can, in the characters of the worthy; on whom we should be always endeavouring to turn the eyes of our acquaintance; to place them and their actions in an advantageous light; to vindicate them from aspersions; to convince as many as possible, how much more valuable and conducive both to private and public welfare a religious and honest principle is, than the most shining and envied accomplishments when separated from it. Accordingly, it should be our study to cherish and recommend such as are eminent for this merit; to support and prefer their interests; to make them known and acceptable one to another; and forward amongst them a general union, that above all things would gain them respect and success. But,

III. Whilst we are thus labouring to encourage virtue and religion, we must be extremely cautious that we obstruct not our own work by favouring any sort of wickedness; that we never patronize for the sake of our own gratification what may probably tempt ungarded innocence into sin, or furnish the ill-inclined with the means of committing it; that we contribute not to raise any bad or even suspicious person to a condition of doing harm; that we protect not the guilty with our interest or our power, nor varnish over their faults from considerations of private interest or friendship; but fairly suffer truth to prevail, and crimes to be detected, as they ought. For whatever particular good purposes may seem, and perhaps but seem, to be served at present by the contrary policy, they will never counterbalance the general mischiefs arising from it. Fur-

ther, we must not pay court to or delight in the vicious, for the sake of some wit and pleasantry, some superficial agreeableness that sets off their vices: we must never even seem to look on either villany or debauchery as objects of mirth only; extol the entertaining qualities of him that ruins others by them, or the abilities of the man that uses them to his neighbour's wrong, else we shall teach those around us to esteem and emulate them. Indeed, we shall accustom ourselves to regard such characters as accomplished and respectable, not as detestable; and come at length, instead of pitying, to despise and ridicule those who suffer by them; thus wickedly augmenting the triumph of the one, and the affliction of the other. David mentions it amongst the distinguishing marks of him, who *shall abide in the tabernacle of the Lord, and dwell in his holy hill, that in his eyes a vile person is contemned; but he honoureth them that fear the Lord.* (Psal. xv. 1. 4.) And St. Paul seems to make it in some sense a less crime for a man to live immorally himself, than to rejoice in others that live so: *who, knowing the judgment of God, saith he, that they which commit such things are worthy of death, not only do the same, but have pleasure in them that do them.* (Rom. i. 32.) We have from nature strong appetites and passions in our corrupted frame, which tempt us so vehemently, and hurry us often so suddenly into some sins, that perhaps we may not be altogether void of excuse. But there is no original principle within us, that leads us coolly and deliberately to approve them in others. This therefore can only proceed from a peculiar and wilful depravation of heart, equivalent to what might be produced by many repeated acts of transgression.

And here it must be observed, that voluntary intimacy with the wicked is one degree of shewing countenance to them, and ought to be avoided. Sometimes indeed, nearness of relation, connections in business, the necessities of affairs; at others, common civility and decency of behaviour, which, though a weaker tie, it may be very unadvisable to break through, oblige us to keep up acquaintances of this sort. And indeed what St. Paul observes of the heathens of his days, that if a man would not *company with the grossly wicked amongst them, he must needs go out of the world* (1 Cor. v. 9, 10.),

is become too true even of the professed christians of ours. Besides, a reasonable prospect of reforming the faulty may justify one, especially of known and confirmed virtue, in conversing much with them, and being, what our Saviour was very truly though maliciously called, *a friend of publicans and sinners*. (Matth. xi. 19.) But to affect, or even permit, beyond what such reasons require, either friendships or familiarities with habitual transgressors of the laws of God, is on many accounts unallowable. On our own account we should resolve against it for the sake of our good name; which, in a world so censorious, it is difficult enough to preserve, by the discreetest behaviour, unsullied; and therefore we must not hope to escape, if by ill-chosen company we give real ground for a bad opinion of us in some degree; and too fair a pretence for carrying it farther than probably we deserve. And yet how soon we may come, by such imprudences, to deserve a much worse opinion than we apprehend, cannot be foreseen, considering how prone both to imitation and to wickedness the human heart is, and how much this propensity must be increased, when we place crimes before it in so alluring a light, as that of their being practised without any scruple by our daily agreeable associates. But were we ever so secure in all respects, there is a dignity belonging to piety and virtue which ought to be supported, and is betrayed when we mix unnecessarily with the profligate and abandoned: whom besides we thus make easy and harden in their unlawful courses; nay, give them also the public credit of being regarded by us, and well with us, which may enable them to do we know not what harm. Besides, by such undistinguishing treatment of men, we disqualify ourselves from shewing that preference to the worthy which is their due, and lead others, more or less, to slight the difference of characters, and, in probable consequence, the notions of right and wrong. *That be far from thee, to do after this manner*; as Abraham speaks on another occasion; *and that the righteous should be as the wicked, that be far from thee*. (Gen. xviii. 25.)

To such degree then, as every one can, he ought to avoid the very appearance of these improper attachments; or, if he hath failed in point of precaution, must

immediately think of the means of disengaging himself. Sometimes a steady adherence to our duty is enough to effect it; and such persons grow weary of an acquaintance, whose conduct reproves them, and whose ears are deaf to their solicitations. But if that proves otherwise, and either the scandalousness of their lives, or imminent danger of being at length perverted by them, requires a more speedy and abrupt step to be taken, we shall do well, on some flagrant occasion, to renounce all commerce with them at once; which, at the same time that it sets us free, may possibly make on them, by the strength of the shock, a salutary impression. Where the familiarity either cannot or ought not to be broken off, the degree of it however may be so moderated, or such exceptions to it contrived in particular instances, that, paying strictly all due regard to them, we may be known to disapprove what they do amiss; stand at a visible distance from the faults of those to whom we are nearest; and be, like our blessed Lord, *holy, harmless, and undefiled, separate from sinners* (Heb. vii. 26.), though we preserve, when called to it, a course of easy demeanour in the midst of them. In proportion as our situation will permit us to vary our deportment from time to time, we may withhold from them, when any enormities of theirs demand it, the usual frankness and cheerfulness of our conversation, and restore it on the prospect of their amendment; we may also, and should be, watchful to express our delight in every right action they perform; to signify inoffensively the affliction we suffer when they misbehave; and thus move their good-nature, if any be left in them, to give us pleasure, not pain, while we so evidently wish them well. But still sometimes neither these nor the preceding methods can be tried, at others they are sure or likely to prove ineffectual; and therefore,

IV. We must have recourse to that which the apostle specifies in the last words of the text, reproving them. Various persons indeed, on various accounts, we cannot reprove for their works of darkness, either having no access to them, or no title to use that freedom: or at most, we can only convey oblique reproof under some agreeable, or however inoffensive, disguise; or make a small advance upon the borders of plain speech,

speech, observing well on which side they are most accessible, and watching for the seasons, when good dispositions either prevail or may be excited. Nor should we neglect any one of these honest artifices, for the skilful application of them may possibly enable us to gain ground, by unperceived degrees, on their inordinate passions and bad habits, and thus carry them such lengths towards reformation, as we should in vain have attempted, had they at first perceived the whole of our design.

But, in many cases, more direct and home remonstrances to the faulty are necessary; which therefore such as with propriety can, are bound to make; and whatever reluctance they may find to so painful a work, must, as the Scripture directs, *in any wise rebuke their neighbour, and not suffer sin upon him*: for omitting it is, in the same place, interpreted to be *hating him in their heart*. (Lev. xix. 17.) Timely admonition may stop him short just at the entrance upon a wrong course, and snatch him out of imminent hazard unhurt. Even those who are farther gone may yet be recalled, by a lively representation of their guilt and danger, of which perhaps they had a very inadequate, if any apprehension. But then we must be very careful, unless we would entirely lose all influence both at present and for the future, that we never bring a charge without having incontestible proof of its truth; that a genuine friendly concern be evidently the principle of all we say; that we express more sorrow than anger, where circumstances will allow it; as they peculiarly do, where the person blamed hurts himself more than any one else; that we use tender expostulations by choice, and harsh expressions; but above all, terrifying and threatening ones, only when nothing else will prevent ruin. For this is, doubtless, the meaning of the apostle's rule: *of some have compassion, making a difference; others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire*. (Jude, 22, 23.) And even where the strongest marks of disapprobation and displeasure are needful, they should ever be shewn without insult or haughtiness; without the least appearance of loving to reprimand, without exaggerating any thing, or treating the frailties of human nature too severely; indeed with such attention to acknowledge and point out whatever in the general

character of the person concerned is valuable, or in the particular circumstances of the case excusable, as may reconcile him, if possible, to the liberties taken with him, by the conviction that they are taken unwillingly.

Many other precautions for the better success of this good work, every one's prudence will suggest to him, in the several instances that come before him, according to the nature of the offence, the temper of the offender, and especially the degree of authority which the reprover hath over him. Sometimes all authority is best laid aside, and softened into mere persuasion; sometimes a moderate share of its weight is wanted to bear down a less complying disposition; at others, its whole force is little enough to fetter a stubborn spirit. Here then we must each of us think and act for ourselves; but with this consideration ever present to our minds, that not only a total neglect of this duty, but a neglect of discharging it in the most effectual manner that is incumbent on us, will be imputed to us for guilt; as it was in the case of Eli, who having contented himself with gently blaming his sons for what he ought absolutely to have forbidden them, and deterred them from; *I will judge his house for ever*, said God, *for the iniquity which he knoweth, because his sons made themselves vile, and he restrained them not*. (1 Sam. iii. 13.)

When therefore mild representations have small effect, rougher treatment must be used. And if the offender grows hardened to private remonstrances, it becomes needful to apply the severer discipline of more open censure. Possibly he may yet retain sensibility enough to be moved by that; for which reason our Saviour appoints, that we observe a gradation; first, *tell our brother his faults between us and him alone*; then, *take with us one or two more*; and lastly, *tell it unto the church* (Matth. xviii. 15, 16, 17.); let the whole number of good persons, with whom we are both of us connected, try their interest with him; and if even that fail, and no hope at all remain of him, yet bystanders at least will thus both be put on their guard against suffering by him, and warned against imitating him. Therefore St. Paul directs; *them that sin, doubtless meaning obstinately, rebuke before all, that others also may fear*. (1 Tim. v. 20) Indeed, were

were every one to be exposed for each misbehaviour of which he is guilty, or even all such as he doth not immediately reform, this procedure would be unchristian and inhuman: many good persons would pass in common esteem for very bad, and many blamable ones, but of whose recovery there is room for great hope, would be driven to despair of regaining any character, and lay aside the thought of growing better. But there is no need of being so tender about the reputations of those who are totally abandoned to sin. On the contrary, it is of importance to the world that they should be known for what they are, and not enabled to pass themselves upon mankind for worthy characters, by receiving the same regards with such in common speech and behaviour. *He that saith unto the wicked, thou art righteous, him shall the people curse, nations shall abhor him. But, to them that rebuke him, shall be delight, and a good blessing shall come upon them.* (Prov. xxiv. 24, 25.) There is frequently no other weapon left against such persons, but public infamy. The punishments of human laws in multitudes of cases cannot reach them. Those of a future life some have brought themselves to doubt; many to overlook. But to the dislike and abhorrence of mankind few or none can be insensible; and every one that deserves it should be made to feel that he doth. Wickedness is the great disturber of the world; the bane of all peace and comfort, civil and domestic. Therefore every one hath a natural right to stand up and declare against it; a claim that the disgrace which belongs to it, be inflicted on it. And in this cause good men should act with spirit; assume the authority in which their character will support them; and not suffer guilt, which is by nature timorous and cowardly, to lift up its head; they should unite in the common concern of opposing its progress; and, as the prophet expresses it, *be valiant for the truth upon the earth.* (Jer. ix. 3.) A zeal, shewn uniformly by the virtuous against vice and that alone; kept free from all mixture of personal resentment or private interest; appearing, by the steps which it takes, not to proceed from moroseness of temper, but from principle, and conducted by a moderate share of prudence, will easily rescue itself from wrong interpretations, secure to itself reverence from the world in general, and produce much good,

without proportionable hazard or difficulty.

It must however be confessed, that neither is every one qualified equally for such a work; some by nature being little capable of exerting themselves or moving others, and some again of so warm passions, that they must not allow them scope even in the best cause; nor will the situation and connections of every one always by any means permit him to appear against ill actions and ill people in the manner that he could wish. Yet no one is left without the means of doing somewhat towards it; and all that we are able to do, without neglecting other obligations, is our duty. Whoever can look with just the same eye on good and bad, provided his own present advantage be out of the question, hath no love of religion or virtue in him. And whoever takes no notice of the difference will be shrewdly suspected of not seeing or not regarding it. The coolest spectator of other wrong things that are done thinks immediately, when any happen to affect himself, that all ought to interest themselves on his behalf, indeed can hardly do it too much. And therefore, when things are done which affect the happiness of others, the welfare of society, the honour of our Maker, our Redeemer, and our Sanctifier, we ought to interest ourselves for these. Perhaps we may object, that our concern would be fruitless. And so, perhaps, was that of David, when he said, *Rivers of waters run down mine eyes, because men keep not thy law. My zeal hath even consumed me, because they forget thy words.* (Psal. cxix. 136. 139.) But certainly so was that of just Lot, who dwelling among the inhabitants of Sodom, in seeing and hearing, vexed his righteous soul, from day to day, with their unlawful deeds. (2 Pet. ii. 8.) Yet they are proposed as objects, not of blame, but praise. And indeed uneasy sentiments on such occasions, however ineffectual otherwise, may improve us considerably by reminding us, that *we are of God, and the world lieth in wickedness* (1 John, v. 19.); provided we carefully restrain them, which itself will be a profitable inward exercise, from running into excess. Besides, whoever preserves this due medium between indifference and vehemence, as he will be always prudently seeking methods of reclaiming, or at least of checking the guilty, and consequently

frequently securing the innocent; so he will find more than any one else can suggest to him; and though hated by the bad, or despised by the thoughtless, for this troublesome activity, will be esteemed by many fellow-labourers, many converts whom he hath helped to make, many ready to fall, whom he hath seasonably stayed and strengthened. Or let him have ever so much cause to say in other respects, *I have laboured in vain, I have spent my strength for nought; yet surely his judgment is with the Lord, and his work with his God.* (Isa. xlix. 4.)

S E R M O N LIII.

Shame and Death the Fruits of Sin.

ROM. vi. 21.

What fruit had ye then in those things, whereof ye are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death.

THE first resolution which every one should take in the conduct of life is, to deliberate seriously as soon as he becomes capable of it, by what rule his future behaviour shall be formed. And one principal cause of the follies which men commit, and the miseries into which they fall, is their strange neglect of this obvious duty; a duty impossible to be controverted; for it is only inquiring what will be most for our interest.

And yet a very great part of mankind never once think of any certain rule at all for their conduct; but go on at random, indulging the present inclination, which way soever it leads, and how often soever it may vary; and thus fill up a life of thoughtless inconsistency, aiming at no one end beyond pleasing themselves any how for the time, let what will follow. But surely a very little reflection might shew, that what pleases us now, may ruin us ere long, perhaps very soon; that different courses of life have very different consequences, highly deserving our attention; and in particular, that those of a virtuous and a vicious life differ so extremely, that we ought not to continue an hour undetermined, longer than we must, which we shall pursue. What the Prophet Elijah said to the Israelites belongs equally to all of this unsettled character: *how long halt ye between two opinions? If the Lord be God, follow him; but if Baal, then follow*

him. (1 Kings, xviii. 21.) Why this perpetual wavering and fluctuation about the first thing that you ought to fix; the one point, on which all depends! If a profane and immoral conduct will produce and secure happiness to you, follow profaneness and immorality; *yield your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin.* (Rom. vi. 13.) But if religion and virtue be the means of true and lasting self-enjoyment, let religion and virtue be your care, and *yield yourselves servants of righteousness unto God.* (Rom. vi. 13. 19.) *Choose ye therefore this day whom ye will serve.* (Josh. xxiv. 15.)

And there are indeed multitudes that would give sufficient proofs of having made a choice, and a very ill one, if running headlong into wickedness merited the name of choosing it. But rational choice presupposes due consideration; whereas these poor wretches have suffered themselves to be led on blindfold, by example and custom, unexamined appearances and ungoverned inclinations, with no more notion of inquiring whether they are in the right road, than if there were no other at all. Or if ever they have deliberated, they have done it unfairly or superficially; or upon some one point of their behaviour, not the whole; and perhaps, only which of two interfering desires, both of them wrong, they should gratify. But surely the first division of human conduct is, into religious and irreligious. Which of these two we ought to prefer, is the question that we are to begin with; and it will be time enough to consider in what way we shall be bad, after we have examined whether it is not our wisdom to be good.

In this most important inquiry an imperfect view of things may easily deceive us, and doth in fact deceive the generality of mankind. We must therefore be very careful to lay before ourselves the whole of what is to be expected, hoped, or feared. But indeed both our own passions and appetites, and the opinions and practices of the world, will be sure to remind us abundantly of what makes in favour of prohibited indulgences. And consequently in order to keep our judgment upright, we must be diligent in representing to ourselves what makes against them. And we cannot possibly do it in a better method, than that of the apostle, addressing himself to the Roman converts: *What fruit had ye then in those things,*

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whereof ye are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death.

In these words is proposed to our serious thoughts,

I. The present unprofitableness of sin.

II. The shamefulneſs of it.

III. The punishment which awaits it.

I shall be able in this discourse to consider only the first point, the unprofitableness of sin, even at present. And for this he appeals to the hearts and consciences of those with whom he argues: *What fruit had ye then in those things?* Well knowing they must own, that upon trial they had found none; a confession which very few have ever failed to make, when, after a life spent in wickedness, they came to reflect coolly, what real advantage they had gained by it on the upshot. The language of those, who will be prevailed on to balance the great account, is almost universally the same, which Elihu in Job ascribes to the penitent; *I have sinned, and perverted that which was right, and it profited me not.* (Job, xxxiii. 27.) Some may imagine this to arise from a disposition, which we have, to be discontented; and to think, after a while, any other way better than that which we have chosen. But how comes it to pass then, that no pious and virtuous man was ever known, calmly and deliberately, to make the same declaration concerning his manner of life? Nothing hath been more common in all ages, than for the wicked to acknowledge their mistakes and their misery, and exhort others to take warning by them. But the good, as soon as ever they had time to become habitually such, have always pronounced themselves easy and happy; and thought it the greatest kindness that they could do to those, whom they loved the most tenderly, to beg they would tread in their steps. Now, in other cases, we look on the agreeing testimony of those, who have experienced what they affirm, as being decisive. Why then should we distrust them in this alone, and obstinately insist upon trying what they forewarn us aloud will be fatal? Indeed, have not some of us tried much too far already? And for God's sake, let us ask ourselves, what fruit we have had from it, and what we are likely to have, in case we proceed further.

But if we will reckon the experience of others incompetent, and our own imperfect, let us consider the natural tendency

of sin. Should we be unable to discover from thence why it should do us harm, we may doubt whether it doth the harm that we are told, or will go on to do the harm that we have hitherto felt from it; but if we see that in its nature it must be unprofitable and hurtful, as well as learn from the experience of others and our own that it is so, then surely nothing will be wanting to convince us.

Now we all know, however apt we are to forget it, that reason is the principal part of our frame: thence, therefore, if we are made with any wisdom, we must expect the principal part of our happiness; and yet every sort of wickedness is absolutely contradictory to reason. Undutifulness to an almighty superior, and ingratitude to a gracious benefactor, such as God is; unkindness to our relations and friends, hard-heartedness to persons in distress, injustice or implacability to any one, or uselessness to those, who are useful to us; degrading ourselves below the rank of our nature, and living only or chiefly to brutal appetites, though we are men; or to trifling pleasures, though we have capacities for much worthier employments: all these things are evidently unreasonable and unfit as any thing can be. And what advantage or what quiet can we hope in disobeying that principle, which was plainly designed to rule us?

Besides, our affections were doubtless originally intended to accord with reason; and, though much disordered by the fall of our first parents, yet in a considerable measure they do so still. Now, can we question, but that disorder is the cause of misery to us here? And if so, the greater we make it by acts of sin, the greater our misery will be; and the more we rectify it by acts of piety and virtue, the nearer we shall return to our natural state, in which alone every thing flourishes and doth well. Right reason and right affection were the primitive rules that God gave man to live by; and how can we fancy that we shall ever find our account in putting a force upon them, and wrestling ourselves from under their government?

But a farther and very material consideration is, that all kinds of wickedness manifestly tend to destroy the good order, prosperity, and peace, of kingdoms, of communities, of families; and that indeed the injuries which men do to one another, by transgressing the laws of God, make

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up the heaviest and bitterest part of the sufferings of life. Now what is contrary to the interest of all in general, must be in some degree prejudicial to that of every one in particular; and each person who is guilty of it, *teaches others an evil lesson against himself*. (Ecclus. ix. 1.) The vicious, even those who value themselves the most on their good nature, are one way or another, perhaps many ways, perpetually doing mischief. They are indeed enemies, as far as their influence reaches, to the whole society of mankind. It is the general interest of the world to oppose and discourage them. It is the particular business of government to restrain and punish them. All that suffer considerably by them, will be sure to abominate them; and most others will scorn and despise them. Now it is a dreadful evil to lose a blessing so justly dear to men, as that of a good name and reputation. To be abhorred, or even suspected and distrusted, by those amongst whom we live, is hardly supportable; to be merely disliked and disapproved, is very mortifying. Yet one or other of these they must expect; not only from the religious and worthy, whose esteem ought to be and ever will be chiefly desired, but also from their fellow sinners; who constantly condemn the sins which they do not practise, and often those which they do. Sometimes indeed some of them may join in applauding their common follies, but that makes them never the less follies. Sometimes, for private ends, persons may flatter for a while such as they inwardly hold in derision or detestation. But this kind of court never doth good to those who receive it; nor is it able to hinder but that on the whole mischievous vices will produce hatred, and imprudent ones contempt. And what fruit can men reap from such things?

But hitherto you have heard proofs only of the common ill effects of all sins; let us now consider the several sorts, and the fruits of each of them, separately.

Some of our bad inclinations are necessarily, in the very feeling of them, uneasy and painful: as envy, hatred, and anger. Others are so at least in their immediate consequences; disquieting our minds with wearisome and endless pursuits, of what we shall either not obtain, or not keep, or be little or nothing the better for, if we do. Such is the exorbitant thirst of power, and rank, and wealth; always restless and

dissatisfied, always full of discontents and disappointments. Again, some of them prompt us to overvalue ourselves, often to our great damage; and at the same time provoke others to undervalue us; as do pride and vanity. Some, if they are accompanied with no pain, yet can make no pretence to giving any pleasure: as profaneness. And the seeming pleasure of some others is in reality scarce more than getting rid of a torment, which a good mind would never have experienced. Such, and no better, is the joy of revenge. Nay, where criminal gratifications are the most agreeable, as in sensual indulgencies; besides that they are usually very fleeting and short-lived, perhaps an equal, perhaps a superior degree of them upon the whole, might by the means of prudence have been obtained consistently with virtue; which doth not forbid the regular and seasonable and temperate satisfaction of any desire, but only restrains us within due and safe bounds; whereas the vicious, affecting immoderate and prohibited liberties, are indeed the unhappiest slaves to their own lusts and fancies; especially when, by a habit of yielding to them, they have taught them to claim, with absolute authority, the most pernicious compliances. And in this situation, how much inward anguish must there often lie hid under the gayest shews of mirth and amusement; whether the soul be oppressed by the settled tyranny of a single passion, or torn in pieces by the rage of opposite ones, contending for mastery! Then, what destructive effects the sins of this kind have on the healths and fortunes of their votaries, disqualifying them, often in the beginning of life, for the enjoyment of every thing in which they placed the happiness of it, and exposing them to great distresses and sufferings throughout the remainder, is much too well known to need enlarging on, though much less considered than its importance requires.

But too many imagine, that, whatever others do, they shall sin with discretion; gratify their inclinations and carry on their designs, of whatever sort they be, with so much art, as to avoid all manner of bad consequences. But why do they imagine so? It is hard enough to govern our passions before they have been accustomed to indulgence. But first to indulge them, and then think to stop where we please, is a scheme that always hath
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deceived, and always will deceive, those who are weak enough to rely upon it. Virtuous behaviour hath plain and firm ground to stand upon; but if once we quit our sure footing there, the declivity is endless, the tendency downwards will increase every moment, and how far we may be carried, God only knows. They who have gone the most fatal lengths in sin, resolved at first, as much as you can do, to proceed cautiously; never once questioning but they could keep their resolution, till it was too late. And it may very soon be too late with any of us. For not only the habit of every vice leads men farther and farther in it, but the most different vices are strangely connected with each other; and he who intended to allow himself in but one seemingly harmless transgression, is drawn by it gradually, or hurried unawares into numbers of worse, that end in his ruin; the grace of God being justly withdrawn from such presumptuous offenders.

But it will be objected, that however unprofitable some sins may be, yet others are peculiarly calculated for profit, as covetousness, with its retainers, fraud and extortion; which *the wise in their generation* (Luke, xvi. 8.) would never practise, unless they found the advantage of them, as they visibly do. Now if by advantage be meant, what should be meant, real happiness, they visibly do not. Covetousness is peculiarly a miserable passion, and distinguished by that very name of miserable in common speech. The temper itself is full of fears and cares, alarms and suspicions. Then in order to gratify it, every benevolent, if not every honest disposition of our hearts must be contradicted; and when it rises to a certain height, every innocent enjoyment of life, that carries the least expence with it, must either be renounced, or grudged while it is tolerated. But without running to such extremes, to all avaricious minds the smallest losses will be heavy misfortunes, and the greatest gains will want something of being so great as they should have been. They must undergo the pain of envying every one that is in circumstances above them; they must expect at the same time the ill will of every one beneath them; and after all, their unnatural cravings, far from being appeased, will increase much faster than their possessions, and the more eagerly they endeavour to quench their

thirst, the more fiercely it will return upon them. Or let us suppose, if you will, the desire of gain to be indulged, not with the absurd view of hoarding to no purpose and no end, but for the delight of satisfying more natural inclinations by the means of great wealth; yet, if these be moderate and reasonable, they may be very competently satisfied without it; and, if they be excessive, you have seen already that they are hurtful, and therefore ought not to have provision made for them.

If then covetousness of both sorts be unwise, fraud and extortion, which only serve as instruments of covetousness, cannot be beneficial. But on the contrary, they have peculiar disadvantages belonging to them. There are indeed instances too frequently of riches acquired by indirect methods; but still dishonesty hath ruined many more than it hath raised, and the ruin of such is never pitied, and seldom retrieved. Fair dealing is the plain path which God hath marked out for mankind to go in; and they who think to be too cunning for their Maker, are few of them able to depart from it without injuring themselves even now, as much or more than they do others. One half of the contrivance and circumspection that men are obliged to in a knavish way, would have enabled them to thrive very well in an honest one, without the hatred and curse of all around them, without the perpetual dread of being detected, and the loss they must suffer whenever that happens, (which seldom fails,) both by others declining to have any further concern with them, and perhaps by the penalties which the law will inflict on them. Or let them escape these dangers ever so well, yet how often doth it fall out that either what they have acquired wickedly they squander foolishly, it may be wickedly too, and so nothing remains with them but the guilt of both; or at least posterity, for whose sake chiefly they have taken these unrighteous pains, dissipate in a few years what they have been accumulating in many; and very possibly give them the torment which they have well deserved, of shewing them, beforehand, that they will dissipate it! And thus is the Scripture warning verified: *An inheritance may be gotten hastily at the beginning, but the end thereof shall not be blessed.* (Prov. xx. 21.)

Yos

You see then how many and great the present and worldly inconveniences of wickedness are; and I have dwelt on them so largely, because present and worldly things are apt to affect us so much. Yet still it must be acknowledged that all of them do not follow constantly, and that sometimes considerable advantages in appearance may be gained by transgressing our duty. But perhaps even then as considerable ones of the same kind may be lost by it; for men cannot have the benefit of two opposite characters and behaviours at the same time. Or, if every thing should happen to their wish, the probability notwithstanding lay greatly on the other side; the contrary was to have been expected; and therefore no wise person would ever run the hazard, though now and then some one may chance to find his account in it.

But indeed we are as yet only in the first article of the account, and have by no means completed that. Not only the positive outward evils that wickedness brings upon us, but the inward satisfactions and comforts of which it deprives us, must be taken in. Sincerity of good will, openness of confidence, faithfulness of friendship, tenderness of affection, consciousness of merited esteem, are the sweetest ingredients in human life. Now all these, with all the complacency and joy of heart that flows from them, the wicked, by their ambitious, their covetous, their sensual pursuits, by their resentments, their falsehoods, their neglects, their provocations, exclude themselves from enjoying; wear out from their hearts by degrees the most delightful sensibilities of which human nature is capable, and leave nothing there but the wretched feelings of hating or disregarding others, and being hated or disregarded by them. Then, in the various afflictions and crosses of life, in decaying health, sinking spirits, and declining age, a good man hath many supports; from the innocence and integrity of his past life; from the love and gratitude of his friends; from the firm belief of a wise and kind Providence continually watching over him. But none of these consolations belong to a wicked man, when he is in the same condition; the things in which he placed his whole happiness have failed him and are gone, the companions of his prosperity desert him, the world rejoices

over him, heaven frowns upon him, and his own heart condemns him.

But this would lead me to the second head, the shame attending sin. After that there remains a third, of the future punishment awaiting it. Both these, God willing, shall be distinctly set before you, and then you will see in the fullest light whatever may seem wanting to the evidence of it now, that *the knowledge of wickedness is not wisdom; neither, at any time, the counsel of sinners, prudence.* (Ecclus. xix. 22.)

S E R M O N LIV.

Rom. vi. 21.

What fruit had ye then in those things, whereof ye are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death.

IN discoursing on these words, I have proposed to lay before you,

I. The present disadvantages of a wicked life.

II. The shamefulness of it.

III. The punishment which awaits it hereafter.

The first of these heads I have finished; and shewn, from the testimony of the wicked themselves, from the inconsistency of all sin with the principles of our reason, from its repugnancy to the original dictates of our affections, from its pernicious influence on every branch of human society, that it must in general produce unspeakable harm to us. Then I proceeded to prove, in relation to several sins more particularly, that some of them are in their very nature painful, and that the pleasures which others promise, are either false and imaginary, or inconsiderable and short-lived; or, to all the purposes of real happiness, equally attainable for the most part by virtuous means; but that the evils which they bring on are various and great, and often speedy, and seldom avoided by the utmost care; that even those sins which may seem peculiarly calculated for profit and advantage, are in truth as unprofitable and hurtful as the rest; and that lastly, besides leading men into the most grievous inconveniences and sufferings, wickedness deprives them of the most valuable even of their worldly enjoyments, comforts, and supports.

Were we therefore only to consider how unhappily it affects all the common and acknowledged ingredients of our present well-being, a course of sin, on stating the account merely thus, would be found, though perhaps not without exceptions, yet with but few exceptions, and such as no one could rationally expect in his own favour, a course of folly; as accordingly we see it constantly represented, even with respect to this world, not only by the sacred writers, but the greatest and ablest of heathens themselves; both such as had some belief of a future state, and such as had none.

But for our fuller satisfaction in a point of this moment, let us proceed farther to consider,

II. The shamefulness of it.

Now shame is of two sorts; arising from a consciousness of having acted either foolishly against our interest, or wickedly against our duty. I begin with the first.

An immoral life being so full of imprudence and suffering as you have seen it is, many and severe reflections on their own mistaken choice must unavoidably torture the minds of the vicious from time to time, be they ever so industrious to banish them. The absurdity of the things which they say and do in the madness of their debauches; the contemptibleness of their condition, while they languish under the effects of them; the miserable wages which they receive for their hard servitude to low appetites; the meanness of going on with what they have a thousand times resolved to leave off; the wretched shifts that they must use to support the expences of their irregularities; the embarrassments into which the most circumspect of them are continually running by unfair practices; the grievous disappointments which the wisest of them experience, from what promised, as they imagined, the truest and highest satisfaction; the extraordinary pains which they have taken, to be never the happier, and are taking still, only to be farther from their end than ever; these are considerations that will find a season to make their way both into the gayest and the busiest minds, and often embitter the relish of their pleasures and their prosperity, even while they are at the height.

But when any remarkable check hath been given to the sinner in his course;

when the iniquities of the fraudulent have exposed him to disgrace and loss, or the extravagances of the spendthrift reduced him to indigence; when the strength and spirits of the dissolute are worn out, or advancing years have brought on satiety and disgust; then, with full leisure for thinking of their doings, and perhaps inability for thinking of any thing else, to see that they have scorned the dictates of reason and the counsels of the discreet and good, only to become miserable; what confusion must they feel from it; they who applauded so highly the wisdom of their own way of life as the only one worth living for, and ridiculed with such unspeakable contempt the silly scruples of the poor virtuous man, whose conduct they now find so vastly preferable to their own!

But farther; this inward self-displeasure and dislike will, in such cases, be greatly aggravated by the censure and upbraiding of the world, redoubled upon them when they can bear it least. Sinners in distress are usually despised and condemned by their very tempters and partners in sin. All whom they have injured will claim a right to insult them. Those to whom they apply for assistance or comfort will have a specious plea for disregarding and rejecting them. The generality will be eager to shew the superiority, some of their goodness, and some of their prudence, by reproaching them bitterly for their want of both. Even the best and best-natured persons, while they mourn over them, must remind them how unwise they have been, and on proper occasions mention them as warning to others. *Lo, this is the man that made not God his strength, but strengthened himself in his wickedness.* (Psal. lii. 7.) Now think, I beg you, what must their feelings amidst all this be!

But besides the shame of folly, they have a much worse kind to undergo, that of guilt; from the consciousness that their behaviour hath been wrong and unworthy and of ill desert. For with what indifference soever many may affect to speak of this, all have at times a sense of it extremely acute. Let any one ask his heart what it thinks, when seriously disposed, of ingratitude for the being which God hath bestowed on us, and the blessings present and future, which he hath provided for us;

us; of wilful and contemptuous disobedience to laws so reasonable and beneficial, as he hath enjoined us; of scornfully slighting such offers of pardon and acceptance, as our blessed Redeemer hath purchased for us by his death, and made us in his gospel; of neglecting the means appointed for our spiritual improvement, quenching the inward suggestions of our heavenly monitor, and *doing despite unto the spirit of grace*. (Heb. x. 20.) Let any one reflect what his deliberate sentiments are of falsehood and treachery, of oppression and violence, of cruelty and implacability, of hard-heartedness and insensibility; what impressions it naturally makes on him to see innocence betrayed to ruin under pretence of tender affection, the peace and honour of families violated, or the due order of society destroyed, to gratify a lewd appetite; to see a rational creature degrade himself below a beast by intemperance, and abandon those to distress, for whom he is bound by the strongest ties to make provision. How do these things look in others? How would they look to you, if you were the sufferer by them? Only remember therefore that they are just the same, when you are the doer of them; and then say, if wickedness of every kind doth not abound in guilt, and merit severe punishment.

Indeed, hath not every sinner, especially at his first entrance into sin, had powerful convictions of this truth; found that there were persons whom he could not see without confusion and dismay; actions which he could not think of without hating himself? And what can make any one amends for being in such circumstances? He may hope indeed, that in time he shall get rid of these troublesome sensations, and may persuade himself, that afterwards he shall be in as good a condition as if there were no ground for them. But surely most abandoned must they be, who can delight in such an imagination; who having once known what shame is, can be content to live on in a course of shameful actions, in hopes of losing by degrees the perception of which are so, and which otherwise. What should we think of a person, who after discerning clearly the despicableness of folly, should consent to be changed into an idiot, merely that he might play the fool without restraint from within; and should fancy it to be comfort enough, that then he should

not know the difference? Yet this man would be chiefly an object of pity; but the others, of utter detestation. And even this ignominious hope of theirs will certainly deceive them. For the faculty of moral reflection, conscience, is planted in us by our Maker for this very purpose, that we may approve or condemn ourselves, according as we act well or ill; and if our understandings be at all cultivated by education, it usually gains vigour enough to answer the purpose, and cannot easily be rooted out. Whether we will be the better for its admonitions is in our own power, else we should not be free agents; but feel them we must. And the many contrivances which the vicious use to lay the sense of their vileness asleep, and the desperate resolutions which they frequently take when they cannot do it, are abundant proofs how sharp the pain of guilty reflection may become.

Some indeed prodigately boast of having got over it, and a few perhaps may; though not near so many, as will at times pretend they have. But what long and tormenting struggles must they probably have experienced first; and in how deplorable a state must the benumbing and stupifying of so important a principle of their nature have left them! The loss of bodily feeling and motion is but a faint image of it. And after all, no one can be secure, that something may not still awaken this dormant power, when he least expects it. Some great and mortifying disappointment, some remarkable stroke of God's providence, some alarming passage in his word, some affecting discourse from the pulpit, some experimental confession of a fellow-sinner, may merely some instantaneous turn in his mind, for which it is impossible to account, may present on a sudden a most tremendous view of himself to his own eyes; or some other person may be induced or provoked to lay his crimes in order before his face, perhaps before the world. And then, whatever ascendant he may have gained over his conscience before, imposing on it with specious colours, or calling off its attention from his past behaviour, yet then he will be forced to behold things as they are; and appear not only wretched and guilty to himself, but an object of abhorrence to others. Now general bad opinion is hard enough to be borne, even when the mind is supported by innocence;

but when infamy is accompanied with the conviction of deserving it, almost intolerable. For the feeling is not only dreadful in itself, but fills the soul with endless jealousies and suspicions, distracting horrors and fears, even of dangers the least probable. *Wickedness, condemned by her own witness, is very timorous; and being pressed with conscience, always forecasteth grievous things.* (Wisd. xvii. 11.) *The wicked are like the troubled sea when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt: there is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked.* (Isa. lvii. 20.) Whose notice soever they escape, the very worst, the basest of their deeds lie constantly open to his view; and what *shame of face* (Ps. xlv. 15.) and dread of heart must that awful recollection excite!

Sometimes indeed these inward pangs drive men, as it was intended they should, to deep humiliation, to prayer for pardon, to laying hold on God's mercy through the merits of Christ, to zealous amendment, through the aid of the holy spirit. And then it is doubtless happy to have felt them; but by no means to have committed the iniquity that caused them; for an equally devout application to heaven with a greater degree of innocence, would have been still more graciously received, and more bountifully rewarded, unless they to whom *many sins are forgiven, love much* (Luke, vii. 47.), and work diligently in proportion, which many unquestionably have done; but who can promise himself that he shall do it, and shall be allowed to experience the joy of doing it? On the contrary, as the self-condemnation which produced this mighty change must have been extremely painful during the accomplishment of it; so afterwards, and perhaps long afterwards, it may prove a burthen heavy enough to convince a very sincere convert, that an early and continued obedience would have been much preferable to his truest repentance. And therefore, as most sinners endeavour to quiet themselves with a prospect of repenting some time or another, they ought most seriously to consider what remorse and dejection they are treasuring up for themselves in the mean while, though they should do at last what such artful offenders have little cause to believe they ever shall. Observe but the case of those, to whom the text immediately relates. They were *made free from sin*, as the next verse tells us,

they had *brought forth fruit unto holiness*, they were in the way to *everlasting life*; yet the apostle calls their past faults, knowing doubtless what he said, *those things whereof ye are now ashamed*. And indeed let any one in the same condition say, whether his comforts are not often embittered, and his prospect clouded, by mortifying remembrances of his former transgressions; whether he hath not frequently returning doubts of God's forgiveness; whether he well knows how to forgive himself.

But very commonly shame comes at last to surround the sinner on all sides in such a manner, that he is ashamed to repent, though he perceives the necessity of it in the strongest light; and between his agitations of this kind, and the tyranny of his unlawful desires, authorised by habitual indulgence, he is reduced to the most lamentable state that the present life knows or can know; continuing the practice of wickedness with his eyes open to all its deformities and dangers; condemning and abominating himself for what he doth, yet going on to do what he condemns and abominates.

Thus you see what internal, as well as external sufferings, naturally belong to irreligious courses. It must however be acknowledged, that though always to be expected, they do not always arise to near the same height. For sometimes the worst of men continue in the most unaccountable prosperity of health, circumstances, and even reputation. Sometimes also education, example, general custom, false reasoning, may in a considerable measure take off the shame of several sins, and give a sort, such as it is, of credit to them. Some persons likewise either have originally, or soon acquire, such an insensibility of heart or giddy thoughtlessness, that they do not undergo what others do, when they have acted amiss. And therefore, lest any possibility should remain to flatter any one that he may be wicked, and yet escape what he deserves for it, the apostle, to deter us effectually from sin, hath added in the text,

III. The future punishment that awaits it, *for the end of these things is death*.

That awful word is well known to signify, in many places of scripture, a state of misery, as life doth of happiness. They are here placed in direct opposition, and the meaning evidently is what our Saviour

Saviour elsewhere expresses: *These shall go away into everlasting punishment; but the righteous into life eternal.* (Matth. xxv. 46.)

It might be very sufficient to determine the choice of man, that wickedness essentially tends to produce misery to its authors, and generally doth produce it, though now and then the case were to prove otherwise. But God is further concerned; and the attributes of his nature and the honour of his government require, that no one sinner shall ever have cause, upon the whole, to rejoice in his iniquities, and glory in his disobedience. If our Maker is allwise and almighty, he can provide for this; if he is just and holy, he will: for else this world of his would be ruled, as we ourselves can feel, and much more then must he, that it ought not. Possibly so minute a regard may appear to some beneath him. But if it was not beneath him to create all things, it can never be so to conduct them to their proper end. If he superintends continually, as he doth, even the least part and movement of the material creation, can it be unfit for him to watch over the actions of rational beings? For what is there worthy of his attention, if they be not?

These considerations, confirmed by our inbred sense of the ill desert of wickedness, yet opposed again by instances of its seeming impunity, and by the frequent calamities of the good, raised in the minds, of men from age to age, perplexing doubts concerning the providence of God; to which however all other things around them gave full testimony. Sometimes they solved the difficulty by discovering that the seeming happiness of the wicked was not real; sometimes by observing that it soon ended in great misery. Yet they were often forced to take refuge and intrench themselves in their general assurance of the divine justice; though when and how exercised, they knew not. But there being no appearance at all of a constant and proportionate exercise of it in this life, the wisest and best of them reasonably concluded there must be another, designed to rectify whatever was wrong here. Yet a future and unseen state of existence, in which we were not to share, till our present frame was dissolved, had the look of an object too remote for human faculties to discern with certainty; so that many good men were tempted to question

it, and those of an opposite character too easily brought themselves to disbelieve it. At least the convictions and presages of it, which they industriously stifled, had no uniform influence on their conduct. And therefore, after various intimations of this great truth given from above, to the earliest and following ages, for some confirmation of what reason suggested, God hath made it fully known to us christians, that *he hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained* (Acts, xvii. 31.): *a day of wrath and revelation of his righteous judgment; when he will render to every man according to his deeds; to them that obey not the truth, but obey unrighteousness, indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, upon every soul of man that doth evil.* (Rom. ii. 5, 6, 8, 9.) So that now, to use the words of Job, *Hell is naked, and destruction hath no covering.* (Job, xxvi. 6.)

Here then is a consideration, before which all that can be said or imagined in favour of sin vanishes at once. And were it constantly as productive of pleasure and profit and esteem in the world, and as consistent with peace in our own breasts, as it usually is the contrary, yet would not a moment's deliberation be necessary in order to renounce it. For what God will punish, never let man hope to be happy in.

The very apprehension of his punishing, the *fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation* (Heb. x. 27.), which no one who believes in God and disobeys him can possibly avoid long together, is enough to sour the very sweetest of unlawful enjoyments, and in the midst of mirth to sink the heart with heaviness. Let every sinner consult his own heart, if it be not. Or how little soever he may feel or dread this at present, yet no one can tell how soon and how deep *the arrows of the Almighty may be fixed within him, the poison of them drink up his spirit, and the terrors of God set themselves in array against him.* (Job, vi. 4.) Or could he go on speaking peace to himself through life, yet the approach of death may rouse him on a sudden from this dream, and crowd such horrors into the small remainder of his days, as will far exceed the longest enjoyments of past sin; horrors accompanied with the insupportable aggravation, that so far as man can judge, they seize him too late to do good.

But what avails it, if the wicked could escape the previous fears of judgment, since they cannot escape the judgment itself? *For behold the day cometh, that shall burn as an oven, and all that do wickedly shall be stubble; and the day that cometh shall burn them up, saith the Lord of Hosts.*

(Mal. iv. 1.) As to the particulars of this punishment, curiosity is by no means the disposition it was intended to raise; and for the degree and duration of it, we are incompetent and partial judges of our own deserts, even in our most serious hours; and much less are we qualified in the seasons of thoughtless gaiety and bold self-confidence. God alone knows what is just and requisite, and from his declarations we must learn our fate; whose threatenings are in all respects as alarming as words can describe; and we may assure ourselves they will not be found vain terrors. Undoubtedly the sufferings of men will be as different hereafter, as their guilt is here. But whosoever shall sin presumptuously in hopes of a light punishment, will by that very punishment merit a heavy one. And who is able to conceive to what the lowest degree may amount, of the misery that will then proceed from the final and exemplary vengeance of Omnipotence on impenitent offenders, from the bitter reflections of their own consciences on their folly and vileness, in first disobeying God, injuring their fellow-creatures, perverting themselves, then refusing the reconciliation which their Creator offered them, their Redeemer died to obtain for them, their Sanctifier was ready to apply to them; and lastly from the absence of all comfort and all hope in those regions, *where their worm dieth not, and their fire is not quenched?* (Isa. lxvi. 24. Mark, ix. 44. 46. 48.) *For such are the dwellings of the wicked; and this is the place of him that knoweth not God.* (Job, xviii. 21.) *Can thy heart endure, or can thy hands be strong, in the day that I shall deal with thee? I the Lord have spoken it, and will do it.* (Ezek. xxii. 14.)

The subject is much too dreadful to be enlarged on farther; and it would ill become, did not the ministry committed to us require it, one sinner to denounce against another, terrors like these. Far be it from us to *make the heart of the righteous sad, whom God hath not made sad* (Ezek. xiii. 22.); or affright the penitent, humble, vigilant believer with de-

vouring fire and everlasting burnings (Isa. xxxiii. 14.), instead of teaching them to rejoice and triumph, that *there is no condemnation to them, who are in Christ Jesus.* (Rom. viii. 1.) But whatever wilful or habitual transgressor, whatever person hitherto indifferent or inattentive to the state of his soul, at any time hears us, to him we must say, if there be any conviction of your danger awakened in your breast, do not suppress it, do not run away from it, do not suffer company, amusement, or business to wear it off; but go, and in secret bewail yourself before God; earnestly beg pardon and grace for the merits of your crucified Redeemer; throw yourself entirely on the mercy freely offered in his name; firmly resolve, in confidence of his strength, not your own, against all sin, all imprudence, all negligence for the future; and recollect every day of your lives that solemn admonition: *Be not deceived; God is not mocked; whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth of his flesh, shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the spirit, shall of the spirit reap life everlasting.* (Gal. vi. 7, 8.)

SERMON LV.

By the REV. JOHN JORTIN, D. D.

On the Lord's Prayer.

LUKE, xi. 1.

And it came to pass that as he was praying in a certain place, when he ceased, one of his disciples said unto him, Lord, teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples. And he said unto them, when ye pray, say, Our Father, &c.

IN the history of our Saviour's life, it may be observed, that no reasonable request was ever made to him, which he did not grant; and no prudent question, which he did not answer and resolve. Of all the requests which are recorded in the New Testament, this in the text may be accounted one of the most just and judicious; *Lord, teach us to pray.* The imperfection of the best, and the ignorance of the wisest is such, that if left to themselves, they would have doubts concerning the things to be asked, and the effects to be expected from their petitions.

Therefore

Therefore this disciple is greatly to be commended, who neglected not the opportunity of obtaining instruction in so important a point from the mouth of divine wisdom itself.

We learn from the gospel of St. Matthew, that our Saviour, before he delivered this form of prayer, discoursed to his disciples concerning the duty of private prayer, and exhorted them to avoid some faults relating to it. The Jewish hypocrites said their prayers in the streets and places of concourse, to be seen of men, to get the character of devout persons, and to promote their own worldly interests. The gentiles multiplied petitions for things temporal, without any devotion, without a due reverence and submission to the divine will. These indecent follies he strictly forbids: he reminds them, that God knoweth the things of which they have need, before they ask him: that they ought not to lay their wants before him in a superfluous abundance of words, nor hope to extort his favour by such absurd methods. Then he proceeds to give them a form of prayer.

It hath been observed by commentators, that this form is taken out of the Jewish liturgies, that our Lord collected it thence, and put it together, and added nothing of his own, except these words, *as we forgive them that trespass against us*; that therefore he was far from affecting novelty, and rejecting any thing that was good, because it was in common use.

If these Jewish forms of prayer are indeed as old as they are said to be, which is doubtful, another observation might be also made, namely, that our Lord, when he had recited this prayer to his disciples, knowing that there was only one expression in it which might seem new to them, makes a particular remark upon it, saying immediately; *for if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you: but if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.*

When our Lord gave this prayer to his disciples, it was not his intention that they should use no other than this in their private devotions, much less, that they should neglect the public worship of God, and the stated prayers of the church, to which, as it appears from the New Testament, both he and his disciples con-

formed. But the Jewish doctors had used to draw up a form of private prayer for themselves and for their disciples; and John the Baptist, as St. Luke occasionally informs us, had given one to his followers; and conformably to this custom of teachers, our Lord, at the request of his disciples, gave them this, to add to their petitions; for it is not to be supposed, that when they prayed to God, they always confined themselves to the Lord's prayer; and indeed our Saviour afterwards gave his disciples new directions concerning prayer, bidding them ask in his name.

But since our Lord ordered his disciples to make use of this form of words, as these expressions imply; *so therefore pray ye*; and, *when ye pray, say*; and since it is to be concluded that they complied with his precept, and repeated this prayer at certain times, the silence of the scriptures being no proof to the contrary; and since the church hath made use of it from very antient times; and since this prayer is most excellent, as every christian must acknowledge; upon these accounts, and for the sake of him who gave it, it becomes us to insert it in our more solemn addresses, and also to account it a pattern and model for all our prayers, to ask for such things as are contained in it, and to make no petitions which are not consistent with it.

Some persons, who have been fond of extemporary prayers, have carried their aversion from stated forms so far as to slight even the Lord's prayer, and to shun the use of it. They have objected to us, the repetition of it in our liturgy; a repetition which, to say the plain truth, is too frequent. But that was not the fault of the compilers of the liturgy; it is to be ascribed to our joining together different services, which were originally intended to be used at different times, or hours.

The Lord's Prayer begins with an address to God, as to our heavenly Father; and with three petitions, or rather pious wishes, that his name may be hallowed; that his kingdom may come, and that his will may be done on earth as it is in heaven.

God is called Father, as he is our creator, and thereby the Father of all things in the universe, particularly of all intellectual beings, and of all men. Their Father he is, both because he made them, and

and because they in some measure resemble him. He is also Father, as he is the preserver of all, upholding and supporting them by his power and providence. He is also our Father in a more excellent sense, by vocation and adoption, having called us to him by Jesus Christ, through faith in whom we become children of God, and are his family on earth, as the angels are his family in heaven.

By calling God, Father, we are reminded of his paternal readiness to hear our reasonable requests, to grant us the things which are good, though we may not have a right apprehension of them, and to withhold from us the things which are hurtful, if by mistake we should wish for them. Not only, if we ask him bread, he will not give us a scorpion; but if we ignorantly ask him a scorpion, he will give us bread.

By calling him Father, we are reminded of that reverence for him, that fear of offending him, that desire of pleasing him, that zeal for his honour, that endeavour to resemble him, and that submission to his dispensations, which, as his children, we ought to entertain.

By calling him Our Father, that is, our common parent, we learn what affection we ought to bear to our brethren, that is, to all men, who, as well as we, are his children by creation or adoption.

It is added, *who art in heaven*; an appellation of God frequently used by the Jews. Not as if God were there only, or so particularly there, as not to be equally every where in essence, in power, and in knowledge; but because his presence there is more gloriously manifested. By the same expression is also signified in scripture his perfect knowledge of every thing, his excellent majesty, his supreme, irresistible power, and his dominion over all.

Thus these first words, which are a preface to the prayer, are proper to produce in us worthy notions of God, and to raise our hope and reliance, our veneration and love.

By the name of God, which we wish may be hallowed, is meant the divine majesty, God himself, as he is known to us by his perfections. We may be said to hallow the name of God, that is, to sanctify or to glorify God, when we entertain in our hearts a right opinion of him, particularly of his moral perfections, as they are called, that is, of his

perfect goodness, and justice, and purity, and mercy; and have a lively and lasting sense of them upon our minds, which produces a suitable behaviour towards him.

We sanctify him, when we declare this our belief, and acknowledge these perfections of God by speaking of him upon all proper occasions in such a manner as becomes us, and by offering up prayers and praises to him. We sanctify him, when our actions correspond with such thoughts and such expressions, and we obediently keep his commandments.

The kingdom of God may be taken in three different senses:

First, his absolute and general dominion over the universe, which was created for his pleasure, which is preserved by his providence, and which depends upon him for its continuance.

This cannot be the kingdom of God mentioned in the Lord's prayer, the coming of which we should desire; for it hath been present, from the beginning, in all times and in all places, and cannot be enlarged or diminished by the behaviour of any of his creatures. We cannot therefore pray or wish for its coming: we can indeed and we ought to rejoice that it is always present, that the Lord reigneth, and that his kingdom is over all, and that we are not exposed to the cruel tyranny of chance or fate, or of imperfect and wicked beings, but that all things are governed by an almighty and most gracious God.

Secondly, The kingdom of God means his government over rational creatures, to whom he gives laws, and who obey him, not by constraint, but freely and by choice. This kingdom may be resisted, and is daily resisted, by evil spirits, and by wicked men. And as this kingdom may be opposed, so it may be increased by the conversion of the disobedient from sin to righteousness.

As our Lord came into the world to destroy the works of the devil, and to promote virtue and obedience to God, the religion of Christ and the state of the gospel is in the scripture frequently called the kingdom of God; and this is what is chiefly meant by it in the Lord's prayer. By praying, therefore, that God's kingdom may come, we express a desire that the gospel of Christ may spread and prevail over the world, may be every-where embraced and practised.

Thirdly,

Thirdly, the kingdom of God in a more eminent and proper sense means that state to come, when sin and death shall be abolished, and the saints shall reign with God in glory and happiness for ever; that kingdom which they shall inherit who are subjects to the present kingdom of Christ, and obey his laws. The kingdom of God in the New Testament usually means both these kingdoms, for they are in some manner one and the same kingdom, and an entrance and continuance in the first leads us to an inheritance in the latter.

By praying then that God's kingdom may come, we pray also and wish for that happy time when we shall have no more to do with this vain and wicked world; when the glorious kingdom of God shall come, new heavens and a new earth, the seat of everlasting peace and righteousness.

By the will of God is not meant what he purposes and resolves to do; for that he will do in heaven and on earth, whether his creatures approve of it or no. But the will of God, in this place, means his desire of being obeyed by rational and free beings, in whose power he leaves it to comply or not. This will of God is done in heaven by the holy angels, who are his ministers to do his pleasure, and who perform their duty to him readily and cheerfully. When we pray therefore that God's will may be done on earth as it is in heaven, we wish that all men, imitating the blessed spirits above, may sincerely and carefully serve their Creator.

It is to be observed, that in the Lord's prayer we in the first place wish that the name of God may be hallowed, that his kingdom may come, and that his will may be done on earth as it is in heaven; in all which there is nothing that relates directly, immediately, and particularly to our own persons. Hereby we are taught each of us to know and acknowledge ourselves to be what we are, a small and inconsiderable part of the creation; to place things in their true order, and to regulate our desires according to the dictates of reason. The honour and glory of almighty God, who is the Creator, Father, and Preserver of all, is to be preferred to every thing else; therefore it is to be first sought and desired by us: the obedient behaviour of all his creatures, by which his honour is promoted and their happiness is secured and increased, stands next;

and our own interest, though it be included in the good of the whole, of which we are a part, is not yet distinctly mentioned. But after we have prayed that God may be honoured by the obedience of all his creatures, we are permitted to offer up some petitions relating more immediately to ourselves, though not to ourselves alone; and they are, that God would give us our daily bread, that he would forgive us our trespasses, that he would not lead us into temptation, and that he would deliver us from evil.

By bread is meant, not what disorderly fancy, and foolish custom, and pride, and luxury, and vanity may have made in a manner necessary to many of us; but those things which are really necessary for the support of human nature, those good things of this life, which God created for our use, and to be received with thanksgiving, those things which our heavenly Father knoweth to be needful for us, and which he hath promised to them who seek first the kingdom of God and the righteousness thereof. This is the bread which we are permitted to ask of God, and we must ask that he would give it us this day, or day by day, that is, not all at once such a quantity of things necessary as may last us our whole life, not treasures laid up for many years, but a constant and moderate provision dealt out to us in proportion to our exigencies, and sufficient to supply our necessities during this life.

This is a petition which it behoves us to put up constantly to God, how flourishing soever our circumstances may be, remembering the fickle state of worldly things, and the folly of placing our confidence in any creature, and the insufficiency of abundance, and power, and friends, and health, and diligence, and prudence, and the brightest abilities, without God's blessing, which is promised to those, who, whilst they are honestly industrious in their callings, rely entirely upon his paternal care and support.

The general sense then of the petition is plain; but the words, daily bread, are not so clear, and perhaps might be better rendered, to-morrow's bread: Give us this day bread for the morrow. This may, at first sight, seem to contradict the precept of our Saviour, wherein he bids us take no care for the morrow. But,

But, first, the care which he condemns, is an anxious care, accompanied with a distrust of Providence; secondly, petitions, of their own nature, look forwards, and are for something to come; and thirdly, we only ask for bread from this day to the morrow, that is, bread for four and twenty hours, which is in reality only one day's bread.

By praying that God would forgive us our trespasses, we are reminded that we all of us offend him more or less, and in many things fall short of our duty; that yet we are sinners by our own fault, and must not charge our transgressions upon a fatal necessity, or a natural impossibility of doing better; that therefore our sins justly deserve punishment, unless God be pleased mercifully to remit that punishment; that he is placable and ready to be appeased upon our repentance; that we should daily desire his forgiveness; that our devotions should be founded on humility; and that when we pray to God for spiritual or temporal blessings, we ought at the same time to have a due sense of our own unworthiness, and meekly to acknowledge it.

Our Lord hath also taught us not to expect forgiveness, unless we forgive those who trespass against us; and this he hath repeated several times, lest we should deceive ourselves in a point so important. He obliges us to affirm before God, who knoweth our hearts, that we are in charity with all men, as often as we ask mercy from him; so that if we are not in this temper, we are reduced to the hard necessity and condition either of not offering up our prayers to God, or of indirectly asking him to punish us.

We must forgive those who trespass against us. And if we really forgive them, we must be free from designs and desires of revenging ourselves upon them; we must wish that they may repent and return to a better mind; we must be ready to do them such good offices as humanity and charity require, howsoever they be disposed towards us; and we must shew them still more favour, if they humbly own their fault, and amend, and seek to be reconciled.

Great is the encouragement which our Lord hath given us to practise this patient and compassionate virtue. *'If ye forgive men,* says he, *their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you.* This

promise, however, is not to be so extensively understood, as if this act of obedience alone could secure to us the favour of God, though we should neglect the rest of our duty. Thus much indeed may be justly hoped and fairly concluded, that he who hath received considerable injuries, and from his heart forgives them, will probably by the good disposition of his own mind, and by the blessing and assistance of God, perform whatsoever is necessary to his improvement and salvation.

The next petition is, that God would not lead us into temptation; in which if we attend to the bare sound, and reflect not upon the sense of it, we may fall into unworthy notions of God's providence.

It is often said upon this subject, that temptations are of two sorts; first, trials of our obedience, intended for our benefit; secondly, enticements to sin, which seduce us from our duty. But this seems not to set the matter in a true light; the distinction is scarcely just. All temptations are of the same sort: they are difficulties which arise in certain circumstances and situations, when reason and duty require one thing, and inclination and passion suggest another. As to the event indeed, sometimes the man overcomes the temptation, and sometimes the temptation overcomes the man.

Concerning this expression, *Lead us not into temptation*, it is to be observed, that to be led into temptation, and to enter into temptation, in the language of the scriptures, signify to be overcome by it. When therefore we pray to God that he would not lead us into temptation, we desire that he would not place us in circumstances, wherein we shall be overcome by the temptation.

But as this may seem to make God the author and the cause of our sins, it must be always remembered that he cannot lead us into temptation by putting evil inclinations in us, or by inciting or enticing us to sin, or by laying us under a necessity of committing it, or by giving evil spirits any power over our will. *Let no man say, when he is tempted, I am tempted of God; for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man.* But in the language of the scripture, whatsoever God permits to be done, or to come to pass, that he is sometimes said to do. He may then, according

according to this way of speech, be said to lead us into temptation, when, because we have abused his long suffering and his kind offers of assistance, or because we rashly seek danger through presumption and self-conceit, or because our hearts are dead to things spiritual, he leaves us to ourselves, and withdraws that assistance which he would have continued to us, if we had asked him for it in a due manner, and done our part in working out our salvation. When such is our case, and we have forced God to forsake us, we shall as surely be overcome by temptation, as if God himself had led us into it, and subjected us to its influence. Therefore when we pray that God would not lead us into temptation, we beseech him that he would not suffer us, for the punishment of our sins, to be deprived of his aid, and to fall into circumstances which will prove destructive to us.

We pray that God would not lead us into temptation: we pray also that he would deliver us from evil, that is, from the evil of sin, which is the consequence of yielding to temptation: or, *deliver us from evil*, may mean, deliver us from the evil-one, from Satan. As the holy Spirit of God is ever willing to succour those who desire to be led by him, and to do the will of God, and as the angels are sent to minister to the righteous, and delight in the employment; so the scripture represents the evil-one as no less industrious to tempt, and to entice men to sin. However, all that Satan can do is only to tempt: he hath no power over our persons or our wills, nor can his allurements hurt, unless we by our own choice yield to them; so that the treachery of our own corrupt hearts is more dangerous than he, or any enemy from without.

The Lord's Prayer is closed with an acknowledgment of God, that his is the kingdom and the power and the glory for ever and ever.

This doxology, or praise given to God, is not to be found in St. Luke's gospel, and it seems not to have been originally in the Lord's Prayer, as given us by St. Matthew. It is left out in our common prayer-book, in some places of the morning and evening services. It was used in the primitive church, and in ancient times, in their liturgy, when the Lord's Prayer was repeated, and at the conclusion of it, and thence it came to be

annexed to it afterwards. However, as it is entirely agreeable to the holy scriptures, both in words and in sense, we need not scruple to make use of it. It may be thus applied to the foregoing words:

We pray, O God, that thy kingdom may come, that thy name may be hallowed, and that thy will may be done on earth; for thine is the kingdom, to thee belongeth dominion, and it is the indispensable duty of all men to honour thee, and their happiness consists in obeying thy holy laws. We pray to thee for daily bread, for the necessities of life, for temporal blessings to be derived from thee the fountain of good, for the remission of sins through thy mercy, and for preservation from them for the time to come, through thy mighty protection; for thine is the power thus to supply our wants, and to keep us from all evil, and to pardon offences. For all these things we pray to thee; for if we do thus our duty to thee by hallowing thy name, and owning thy kingdom, and acting according to thy will, and if thou vouchsafe to pardon and protect us, thine will be the glory for ever and ever. Amen.

S E R M O N LVI.

On Industry.

2 THESS. iii. 8, 9.

Neither did we eat any man's bread for nought; but wrought with labour and trouble night and day, that we might not be chargeable to any of you: not because we have not power, but to make ourselves an example unto you to follow.

ST. Paul found it expedient on many accounts to recommend industry in their worldly callings to the first christians. They who in those times received the gospel by their own free and deliberate choice, upon serious examination, having arrived first to years of discretion, who were convinced of its truth by the signs and wonders wrought to confirm it, who had been bred in Jewish superstition, or in pagan ignorance, and who were thus suddenly removed from darkness into light, and from doubt and diffidence into full assurance; they, I say, had these considerable advantages over us, that they usually felt a more lively sense of the evidence

dence and the importance of christianity, had brighter examples of goodness amongst them for their imitation, were more affected by the glorious promises of eternal happiness which were set before them, and looked with more indifference upon a world from which they had little to expect, besides scorn and reproach and malice and persecution.

But if their faith was accompanied with greater degrees of fervour than are commonly found amongst us, yet some inconveniences might arise even from that zeal. Piety, when it is not guided and governed by prudence, may degenerate till at last it becomes wild extravagance. A contempt for this world, and for all its concerns, may be carried too far; and St. Paul seems to have feared lest some should run into this extreme, and neglect to provide for themselves and their families, through a fanatical notion that a christian could have no leisure for such low occupations; and lest others, influenced by laziness, or by worse motives, should imitate them in this supine negligence.

For the apostles, and they who like them were then appointed to preach the gospel, had seldom leisure to labour in their worldly callings, and had a particular assurance from Christ that he would provide for them. This might mislead other christians to rely indiscreetly on the divine Providence, and to think that these promises were equally extended to them.

There seems besides to have been at that time a current opinion that the second coming of Christ, and the end of all earthly things, was at hand, which might have a bad effect upon some injudicious persons, and produce too much indolence and carelessness in worldly affairs.

The eminent liberality also of the first believers might prove a temptation to dishonest, sluggish, and insincere men (for such there have been in the church at all times) to indulge a lazy temper, and to live at the expence of those christian societies into which they had entered themselves.

Some of those heretics of the most ancient times, who are recorded in ecclesiastical history, were in all probability induced by no other motive outwardly to profess christianity, than by hopes of a share in the public collections; and accordingly, whensoever distress and per-

secution arose, and they had a near prospect of more danger than profit, they could easily secure themselves by deserting the church, and renouncing the faith.

Thus, unless proper care were taken to prevent this evil, the church, instead of being a society of honest, frugal, and diligent persons, able to maintain themselves and those who were proper objects of their charity, would have become a mere nest of drones.

St. Paul, therefore, as a pious and a prudent teacher, recommended industry to the christian world, not only by precept, but by example.

He himself on more than one account had a claim to a maintenance from the public.

As a preacher of the gospel and an apostle of Christ, he had a right by custom, by equity, and by the laws of God, to receive a subsistence from those whom he instructed, as he proves in his first Epistle to the Corinthians.

As he was the apostle of the gentiles, the care of many churches lay upon him, he had a much larger province than any of the apostles, he was obliged to labour more abundantly in the gospel than they, and therefore less able to spare time in labouring for a maintenance.

Add to this, that a small sum was sufficient for one man, and for a man who desired nothing besides food and raiment.

Yet he sometimes chose to wave even this privilege. *I have used, says he, none of these things, neither have I written these things, that it should be so done unto me; for it were better for me to die, than that any man should make my glorying void.* He chose rather to feed himself by his own toil and industry, by labouring night and day, because he would not eat any man's bread for nought. *I have coveted, says he, no man's silver or gold, or apparel. Yea, you yourselves know that these hands have ministered to my necessities, and to them that were with me. I have shewed you all things, how that so labouring ye ought to support the weak.*

Such a person might boldly and earnestly press the observance of a duty which himself had so remarkably fulfilled; and indeed he lays a great stress upon it, and represents it as more important than some usually imagine it to be. If any

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one should neglect to provide for his own family, we should perhaps call him a careless, an indolent, an imprudent man: but St. Paul says, *If any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own household, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel.*

Study, says he, *to be quiet, and to do your own business, and to work with your own hands, as we commanded you.*

And again; *When we were with you, this we commanded you, that if any would not work, neither should he eat.*

Again; *Let him that stole, steal no more; but rather let him labour, working with his hands, that he may have to give to him that needeth.*

And in the text; *Neither did we eat any man's bread for nought; but wrought with labour and travel night and day, that we might not be chargeable to any of you: not because we have not the power, but to make ourselves an example unto you to follow us.*

We may consider this example of St. Paul as a precept, first of industry in our worldly callings; secondly of industry in our religious concerns. Each of these duties I shall now endeavour to recommend, beginning with industry in our worldly callings.

I. If we hope to acquire what is necessary for our subsistence, to preserve it when we possess it, to provide for those who depend upon us, and to avoid gross and scandalous ignorance, labour of the body, or of the mind, or of both, must be undergone. I shall not endeavour to prove the truth of this assertion: it is generally known and acknowledged; and few have denied it. We read in ancient history of a sect of christians, who from those words of our Lord, *Labour not for the meat that perisheth*, concluded that they ought not to do any work to get their bread. We may suppose that this sect did not last long, that these sluggards were soon starved out of the world, or rather that cold and hunger sharpened their wits, and taught them to be better interpreters of scripture. It may seem strange, and hardly credible to some persons, that there should have arisen such a sect as this: but daily and woful experience shews us that there is nothing so strange, nothing so senseless, which some men will not throw out, and which others will not swallow.

Industry in our worldly callings is necessary, because it is impossible to neglect it and to be obedient servants of God, as it may appear several ways.

Naked came we into this world, and destitute of all things which support and preserve life; naked also as to our minds, which at first are a mere blank, and have no knowledge. But the soul and the body are made and designed by their Creator, the one to improve in understanding, the other to increase in strength, and to be employed by the soul in a manner which may conduce to the welfare of both. Thus God by the voice of nature teacheth us that he designed us to be improvable and industrious beings.

To these deductions of reason the scriptures agree in many places. They tell us that God put the first man into the garden of Eden, to cultivate and embellish it. Afterwards, upon his transgression, it was told him that his work should be increased, and that in the sweat of his face he should eat his bread. *Great travel is created for every man*, says the author of Ecclesiasticus, *and a heavy yoke is upon the sons of Adam, from the day that they go out of their mother's womb, till the day that they return to the mother of all things.* This is very true; and yet so many advantages both to body and mind arise from labour, that it may be made a question whether the toil which God enjoined to Adam after his fall, and to his posterity, was a punishment or a favour. Certain it is that labour, if it was brought into the world by transgression, is one of the best preservatives against it; if it was the child of sin, it is the parent of virtue.

Again; God who hath made us incapable of subsisting by ourselves, and obliged to our fellow-creatures in part, for the things which we possess, teaches us by the voice of reason that we also in return ought to promote the welfare of others. Before we come to years of discretion, we have contracted a debt of gratitude to those who have educated us, and to the nation to which we belong. We cannot refuse to discharge it without great injustice, nor can we discharge it without industry in our callings.

The gospel strictly commands us to do good, to assist, to instruct, to direct, and to relieve. It commands us therefore what the idle person hath neither power
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nor inclination to perform. Laziness is always attended with ignorance, and usually produces poverty; and it is not to be expected that he who is so negligent of his own body and mind, should be serviceable to others, and should love his neighbour more than himself.

Add to this, that in general whosoever is slothful in business, in his worldly concerns, will probably be a slothful christian too; for the same temper which disposes to the one, disposes to the other; and the same difficulties which deter a man from labouring to live creditably, will discourage him from striving to live religiously. It is the nature of idleness to hate to take pains, and of goodness to be active; and therefore there is little reason to hope that they should meet and dwell together.

Idleness is the parent of vice. He who hath some end, some innocent and honest end to pursue, and is constantly busy in contriving and executing what tends to it, and hath accustomed himself not only to labour but to delight in his calling, keeps beyond the reach of many temptations, or if they find him out, will often send them away, because he is not at leisure; but numberless are the temptations to which the sluggard is exposed, and by which he is continually assaulted.

His understanding is furnished with nothing good and useful, it pursues nothing steadily, it hath contracted an aversion from serious study and meditation: his imagination will therefore be restless, and rove in quest of one folly or other, for entertainment; for the soul is busy whether we will or no, it cannot cease from thought, design, and action, of one sort or other, either useful or frivolous, either good or bad; and when it is not directed to that which is profitable, and tied down to some particular work, will grow wicked for want of employment. A vacant mind is a proper habitation for a devil: it is the house, which he cometh and findeth empty; then goeth he and taketh with himself seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and they enter in and dwell there.

An idle person usually loaths his own company, for which indeed he is not much to be blamed. He cannot endure to converse with himself or with his betters. This drives him to contract unprofitable friendships, or rather acquaintances, for

seldom is there friendship where there is no virtue. He seeks out those who are like himself, and whose time is a burden to them: he becomes a companion of mean and debauched persons; their bad qualities he soon imitates, and makes no small progress in vice, which is the only thing that he is disposed to learn.

An idle person, unless favoured by an extraordinary concurrence of circumstances, falls into want, and thence into wickedness; for he who through laziness becomes poor, is usually prepared for any mischief. When he is reduced to straits, then follows, What shall I do? I cannot dig; to beg I am ashamed. But nature craves, and his wants are importunate: something he must do, and it must be something which is not laborious, and only requires lying, or forswearing, or cheating, or robbing, or some other vice.

Thus it appears that industry in our worldly affairs is a duty which God requires from us, that there is a closer connection between it and religion than we usually imagine, that it is impossible to live an idle life and a good life, and that he is really serving God, who is busy in his calling.

Another motive to diligence and industry is, that of all bad dispositions laziness is perhaps the most deceitful, and the most vexatious, and that in all honest labour there is much satisfaction. The love of ease and pleasure produces idleness; yet such is the nature of things, that idleness produceth neither ease nor pleasure, but the reverse. All men value the conveniences of life: the idle person takes the surest way to penury. All men love respect and reputation: the idle person is ever contemptible, because he is ever unserviceable and ignorant, an useless burden of the earth, salt that hath lost its flavour, fit for nothing else than to be cast out and trodden under foot. All wish to have faithful friends upon whose good offices they may depend: the idle person very seldom finds such, and if he has them, he often loses them, because he hath no amiable qualities which may recommend him to them, and secure their esteem. All desire peace at home, and the love of those to whom they are nearly related: the idle person takes no care of his family, and can expect no affection there. All would unbend their minds sometimes, and

and rest a little from their labours: but the lazy person, who would perpetually amuse himself, is disappointed in that also, and tired and cloyed even with his diversions; for pleasure is no pleasure when it becomes the sole employment, and must be interrupted often and long by serious affairs, to become acceptable and entertaining.

The desire of the sluggard killeth him. He hath desires as strong as the most active and industrious ever feel, and indeed stronger, because he follows no business, an attention to which would drive out of his mind vain and foolish wishes. He desires wealth and pleasure, and honour and power, and the favour and esteem of the world. He desires that these things would come and seek him out, and offer themselves to him, without any endeavour exerted on his part to obtain them; and these desires are usually disappointed, and leave him to the vexation which arises from inconsistent affections. Then follow dissatisfaction, dislike of his condition, envy and hatred of those who surpass him in good qualities, and are in high esteem, of those whose labours are recompensed with success, and of those who, deservedly or undeservedly, possess the things which he covets.

These are vexations from which industry in our callings will secure us. It hath a tendency to preserve health of body and serenity of mind: it repays us with something that is grateful and useful. In all prudent labour of the hands or the head some acquisition is made; we maintain ourselves, and are not burthensome to others; we get skill, dexterity, and experience, and so learn to do our work with less toil and trouble; we improve our understanding, and find out truths which more than reward the pains of seeking them.

By industry we obtain credit and reputation. Every one is willing to employ a diligent person, and whatsoever his condition be, he cannot be contemptible.

By industry we shut out many implacable enemies to our repose, many fretting desires, and sorrowful reflections, and turbulent passions, and violent temptations.

By industry we become beneficial to others, able to assist our friends, to relieve

the poor, to instruct the ignorant, and to provide more especially for those whom God hath committed to our care.

Thus much concerning industry in our worldly callings.

II. Let us now pass on to diligence in religious affairs, in working out our salvation, to which we have the most pressing motives.

The shortness and uncertainty of life warns us not to neglect it; for since upon our present behaviour depends our future state; since the days of man are few, few according to the course of nature, and often made fewer by a thousand unforeseen accidents, it behoves us to lose no time, but to set about our duty instantly, to-day whilst it is called to-day.

The reward set before us excites us to it. We think it reasonable to labour for conveniencies which are temporal, that is, uncertain and transitory; and this industry is commendable. Much more should we exert our utmost care and diligence in securing to ourselves the unchangeable favour of God, the society of saints and angels, and an endless happiness which shall be mixed with no sorrows and disappointments.

Gratitude moves us to it; to serve him with all our power who hath done so much for us, with whose benefits we are enclosed and surrounded, which way ever we cast our eyes and our thoughts.

The punishment allotted to the idle and wicked servant calls us to it, to think no labour too great by which we may avoid the wrath to come. Infamy and reproach, and want and dependence appear in terrible forms to us, and to escape them we are willing, if we have any spirit, to labour incessantly, and to submit to the hardest toil. Fools and blind, if we perceive not that these are nothing, compared to the woe which must be the future portion of those who will not serve God here in this state of probation.

Our present interest invites us to it, to be most industrious in pursuing the welfare of our soul, which will procure us peace of mind, and the blessing of God even upon our worldly undertakings; whilst a neglect of our duty to him will be attended with fear and remorse, and give us an uneasiness which outward circumstances, however flourishing, will not be able to compose.

Such motives we have to religious industry. Every Christian will certainly allow them to have sufficient weight and force, and acknowledge that eternal life is desirable, and that it is an indispensable duty to serve God. But the illusion is this: We are inclined to think this duty so easy to be performed, that a very little diligence and caution will be sufficient.

Let us then consider what kind of expressions the sacred writers use, when they speak of our Christian duty. They exhort us to be rich and fruitful in every good work, to be ready to every good work, to be zealous of good works, to abound always in the work of the Lord, to pursue and work good towards all men, to exercise ourselves in godliness, and in the labour of charity, to work out our salvation with fear and trembling, to give diligence to make our calling and election sure, to continue patiently in well-doing, to run that we may obtain a prize, and to press towards the mark, to watch continually and be upon our guard, to give all diligence to add one virtue to another, to walk circumspectly, to watch incessantly, to prayer, to gird up the loins of our mind, to strive that we may enter in at the strait gate, to wrestle against principalities and powers, to take the kingdom of heaven by violence, to fight that we may receive a crown, and to war a good warfare, and to endure hardship as faithful soldiers of Jesus Christ.

Thus the Scriptures tell us plainly, that without some labour we cannot be good. The difficulties with which the first Christians struggled were many and great; and difficulties of one kind or other will ever be arising. We are assaulted by importunate temptations; we often feel a propensity to go aside from our duty, and we are surrounded with bad examples, with multitudes who pursue their own destruction. When we reflect upon these things, we may perhaps be led into the other extreme, and suspect that the ways of righteousness must needs be disagreeable, and that the passage through them is tedious and painful.

But the Scriptures say that the ways of religion are ways of pleasantness; and the word of God is true, and consistent with itself. That obedience is a labour, and that it is a pleasure, are equally certain. That these things are reconcilable

will appear, if we consider that in all honourable and profitable employments, in all arts, in all studies, the beginnings are difficult, and the difficulties must be mastered by obstinate application. But many things contribute to lessen those difficulties daily, or to make men less sensible of them; as, a sprightly resolution, present profit, the hope of still greater advantages, experience and practice, and long custom, which is a second nature. Thus some, whom idle bystanders judge to lead a wretched and laborious life, are really most contented and pleased with their condition; for a man is just as miserable as he thinks himself, and if he delights in industry, industry to him is a diversion, and idleness is a toil.

So also is it in our religious concerns. The duty of a Christian is a laborious thing, especially to those who have bad dispositions to conquer, or particular difficulties to encounter; but when we do any thing good with labour, the labour passeth away, and the good remains: when we do any thing evil with pleasure, the pleasure passeth away, and the evil remains; and then custom making our obedience habitual, an even temper, peace of mind, and many other present advantages springing from it, the hope not only of escaping future evil, but of obtaining everlasting life, and the divine assistance vouchsafed to us as far as it is needful, will by degrees make our inclinations join with our reason, and our duty become our delight.

SERMON LVII.

On Contentment.

PHILIPP. iv. 11.

I have learned in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content.

IF content ariseth from pleasure, and discontent from pain, and if the mind be exposed to receive impressions of pleasure and pain from the things which surround it, it seems to follow that content cannot be taught or learned, and that it depends not so much upon us, as upon the circumstances in which we are placed. But if there be pleasures which the mind can secure to itself, and if God hath made us capable of acquiring blessings which out-

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ward objects can neither give nor take away, the art of being contented may be learned, and this happy temper may be acquired.

There are many reasons for which we ought to be contented, and there are certain means, by the use of which we may learn to acquiesce in our condition, which I shall lay before you, after a few observations upon the nature of contentment.

1. There is no occasion to say much in its praise, and to persuade men that it deserves to be sought, and that they will find their account in it. Every one is desirous of it, and agrees in setting a just value upon it.

2. Some there are who possess all the necessities of life, and want no external helps to happiness, and yet are not satisfied, because their desires are extravagant and boundless. It would be a vain attempt to endeavour to teach such persons contentment, who have so many things to learn, and so many to unlearn, before they can hear reason upon this head.

3. It is not necessary that he who is contented in his state, should prefer that state to any other, or should never use any endeavours to mend his condition. A person may be contented, who has not some of the conveniencies of life, and who is seeking to acquire them: but then he will not be uneasy without them, or afflicted and dejected if he should meet with disappointments in his pursuits. If he can obtain them, they will be welcome to him; if he cannot, he will not be much disturbed about it.

4. Contentment, even in a prosperous situation, is a commendable quality, since it depends much upon goodness of heart, and a right temper of mind, and without them is not attainable in any condition: yet it must be confessed that when there is an affluence of all accommodations, it is no extraordinary accomplishment to be satisfied; so that this virtue is better tried, and appears to more advantage when we are deprived of the things which are generally valued, and might be innocently enjoyed. This is the contentment on which we propose to discourse. St. Paul says in the text, that he had learned to be contented in all states. And what state was his? The history of the Acts of the Apostles and his own Epistles will inform us, that it was a state which to the

greater part of men would be very unacceptable and very irksome.

5. Contentment, as it is a virtue, may be said to belong chiefly to a condition which is not the easiest, nor yet the hardest and most wretched. In sore calamities and extreme misery, there is another virtue very nearly related to contentment, which seems to take place; namely, a patient resignation to the will of God, which hath in it every thing that is to be found in contentment, except cheerfulness.

6. Lastly, If every thing happens to us at present according to our desires, if God hath liberally poured down upon us temporal blessings, if we have friends, and health, and honour, and riches, and youth, yet we should study to acquire that most useful and excellent art of being contented in every state, and of preserving an even temper of mind under any change of circumstances; for we know not how soon we may have occasion to practise this virtue, and we may be almost certain that such occasions will arise in the course of life, and in a state where nothing is of a fixed and permanent nature. Friends may die, and friendships may be dissolved, health may be soon and suddenly and irretrievably lost, promises may be broken, and kindnesses repaid with ingratitude, riches may make themselves wings, and take their flight, the favour of the world is uncertain, reputation is not always secured by innocence and desert, our best days steal silently and insensibly away, and others less agreeable succeed them.

I proceed now to offer some reasons for which we should be contented in our state, though it be exposed to inconveniencies.

I. If we are uneasy, impatient, angry, vexed, envious, querulous, and dejected, because we have not this or that which we think suitable for us, we act most absurdly, we add to our misery, we afflict ourselves to no purpose, we are our own enemies. If all sin be folly, if every bad disposition be irrational, discontent is so in a more eminent manner.

A greater stress should not be laid upon this argument than it will bear, and therefore we must acknowledge that, considered by itself, and not seconded by other motives, it will hardly prove strong enough to calm a dissatisfied mind. And yet it hath its use, which is this: Since dis-

content is confessedly a very troublesome evil, which makes our condition worse than it would else be, the consideration of this should dispose us to use our utmost endeavours to overcome it, and patiently to listen to those arguments which may convince us of the wisdom and profitability of the contrary temper.

II. Another motive to contentedness may be drawn from observations made upon the state of mankind, upon the evils and calamities with which this world at all times abounds. We cannot entertain a more foolish hope than to expect to be distinguished by a constant course of happiness from that cloud of sufferers which surrounds us. We complain of our own hard lot, we repine at this or that inconvenience, whilst there are thousands, whose state is so far worse than ours, that they would think themselves happy if they might exchange their condition for that which we think so insupportable. We imagine, it may be, that we have many causes of discontent: we should look abroad a little, and see how it fares with the rest of mankind; and when we have done this, if we return home again and enter into ourselves, and consider our condition, we shall find that perhaps it is not so bad as it might have been, and that there is nothing uncommon in it.

This is an argument which heathen authors have very frequently used, and which they seem to have accounted one of the best. But it may be thought liable to a few objections.

First, it may be said that evils are not the less felt by us because we know that others also suffer them; and that the consideration of the calamities abounding in all times and places, of which every one must expect a share, is rather a motive to us to be willing to leave the world, than to be contented in it.

The objection is not material. To say that our evils are not alleviated from the consideration that they are common to mankind, is to cavil, and to contradict matter of fact, and the testimony of multitudes. And to the observation that reflections upon the troubles of life will rather incline us to dislike the world than to be contented in it; to that it may be replied, a moderate contempt of the world and contentment are not far asunder: repining and discontent arise

from a violent affection for things here below; and a coldness towards them enables us to bear the diminution, the absence, or the loss of them the more calmly.

There remains another and a stronger objection, namely, that it is a spiteful and malicious comfort which is drawn from the sufferings of others, and a proof that we take pleasure in them, and would see none happier than ourselves.

The proper answer to it seems to be this: Evils of any sort are then most irksome to us when they come unexpected, and surprise us unprepared to bear them. We then think our condition particularly hard, and ourselves singled out, as it were, by Providence to suffer more than others; and we persuade ourselves that any one would be as uneasy as we are. But observations upon the course of things will teach us to arm ourselves against disappointments, and not expect a settled prosperity; they will inform us of greater afflictions than in all probability we have known, and of many persons who have shewed an evenness of temper, and a calmness of mind, under circumstances as undesirable as ours, and who have made them light by bearing them decently. Such reflections surely may be made without any malignity, any satisfaction arising directly from the misfortunes or miseries of others. When we read or hear of great and good persons, adorned with useful and amiable accomplishments, overlooked and neglected by the world, exposed to poverty, losses, slights, censures, or other inconveniences, proceeding with patient serenity and mild composure, neither envying the fortunate, nor fawning upon the worthless, nor bemoaning themselves, nor repining, nor complaining; in contemplating these characters, we find instruction and relief, and pleasure too, a pleasure accompanied with no malevolence, but with the sincerest esteem for such persons. There is indeed such greatness and dignity in suffering virtue, that it can hardly excite our pity, which seems to give place to admiration and applause. Our Saviour, speaking of good men tried with adversity, and maintaining their patience and integrity, represents them rather as objects of reverence than of compassion, annexes blessedness to their condition, and pronounces them happy upon the whole.

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III. Another motive to allay our discontent may be suggested to us from considering the bad disposition of so many persons, who having those things of which we are deprived, yet are by no means contented. They want something which they have not, or they are afraid of losing that which they have. We think them no better than fools. But have we not reason to fear that if we were in their situation, we should be just such fools as they? A person who is resigned and contented in an inconvenient state, may reasonably enough presume that a better state would not spoil him; but the same discontent which makes his present condition so irksome to him, would probably follow and accompany him even in the midst of plenty and prosperity.

IV. Another cause for contentment may be drawn from such a consideration of divine Providence, as the light of reason will suggest. God is our common Father, the best and greatest of beings: he is not an unconcerned spectator of causes and effects; he is not ignorant of our condition; he is not envious and cruel; he takes no pleasure in our disappointments and sorrows; he places us in a state which he knows to be convenient for us, though we perhaps cannot at present discern it to be so. Let us therefore humbly, and, if we can, cheerfully commit ourselves to his care, and be contented to act the part allotted to us. To will what God wills, to like what he orders, is a duty which was discerned by several persons even in the pagan world, and recommended by some of them in an excellent manner.

V. Another reason for contentment is taken from a consideration of the advantages and of the good things which fall to our share. Every dissatisfied person is ungrateful. What he has not he knows too well, and calls to mind too often; and of what he has he seems to be quite ignorant. Several blessings which deserve daily return of thanksgiving are lost upon him, blessings which relate to his mind, or body, or possessions, or friends, or family.

VI. It should also be considered that there are many advantages which often arise out of those very inconveniencies which we dislike, and that there are many evils and bad consequences which fre-

quently attend a more flourishing condition.

We may instance in poverty, that is, in a middle state between indigence and wealth. A person in that state hath perhaps few friends, but they are usually sincere; he hath few enemies, and those usually inconsiderable. Envy and calumny commonly spare him and overlook him, as one beneath their notice: his wants call him to labour, to industry, to temperance, and these are the best means of preserving the health of his body and of his mind. Thus might we survey and examine many of the hardships and misfortunes of which men complain, and point out something profitable which often accompanies them and lessens their weight.

But wealth and power and prosperity, though harmless in themselves, are to many persons very pernicious; to a weak mind and a bad temper they prove fatal blessings and dangerous companions. They come like proud and magnificent guests, and bring with them a long train of troublesome attendants, of follies, and cares, and disorders; they teach men to forget their great concern, to contract an immoderate fondness for the amusements and allurements of the world; and by raising their passions and weakening their reason, they make them unable to bear even common and trifling disappointments.

VII. I have shewed that we ought to accept of the state in which Providence hath thought fit to place us: and the reasons hitherto used have been those which our own abilities enable us to discover. But there are yet stronger motives to contentment, which revelation more particularly suggests to us. Contentment is best learned in the school of Christ: there St. Paul learned it; *I have learned, says he, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content. I know both how to be abased, and how to abound: every where and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ who strengtheneth me.*

Another reason then for contentment may be drawn from considering God's love and care for us, as set forth in the gospel. He is there represented as the Father of mercies, and the God of all consolation; we are there taught that he

loved us before we loved him, and so loved the world, that he gave his only Son to mankind, and with him and by him remission of sins and assurance of happiness; that he who conferred upon us so inestimable a benefit, will certainly refuse us nothing expedient for us; that he who gave us his Son, will freely give us all things; that he is our Father, who loves us better than any parent ever loved any child; that we may cast our cares upon him, because he careth for us, and will never forsake those who serve him; that when evil of any kind befalls us, God permits and designs it for our profit, either to wean us from this world, or to try our love to him, and to exercise our virtue, or to correct us for some failings, or because too much prosperity might be dangerous and fatal to us; that all things shall work together for our good, and that we shall receive from him an hundred fold now, in this present time, that is, many solid advantages, which are beyond comparison more valuable than those upon which the world sets so great an esteem.

VIII. Another motive to contentment ariseth from reflexions upon our own defects and unworthiness. If upon a review of our lives, our conscience bears witness against us that we have been guilty of many transgressions, and this is the case of many a discontented person, all dissatisfaction under our present condition must be most unreasonable and ungrateful. How can we think it hard that God should not grant us all our desires, when we have not given him what he requires from us? Instead of yielding to sullen discontent, we should be very thankful that we have opportunities in our hand of reconciling ourselves to him by amendment. Why should a living man complain? Life, considered only in itself, is perhaps of no high value; but to one who hath mispent his past days, and been negligent in his duty, every hour of it is an inestimable treasure, because rightly employed it may conduce to his eternal welfare. Whosoever hath still his peace to make with God, and time still allowed him to do it, should esteem himself most happy, and think of the case of those sinners whose fun is set, from whose eyes the things belonging to their peace are now hid, and who are gone to receive the recompense of their

evil deeds. How gladly would they return, and take up with a life which he thinks destitute of all comfort!

IX. The last motive to contentment which I shall mention, arises from the consideration of the reward which is set before us.

It is a most certain and evident truth, that if any person firmly believed a future state of happiness, and could entertain an humble and modest hope that he should have some share in it, he would more easily rest satisfied with his condition for the few days of his pilgrimage here below. The expectation of undisturbed peace and rest from all trouble, the hope of living for ever with God and with good beings, and of making a continual progress in wisdom and knowledge, in virtue and in every amiable disposition, would compose the mind, and raise it above care and disquiet. Temporal inconveniencies would then seem little and inconsiderable, and the common objects of men's hopes and fears, of their desires and uneasiness, would appear as a shadow which in a moment is and is not. Whilst the inhabitants of this world are busied in various employments with eager diligence and assiduity, as if they had no views reaching beyond this life, or as if they were to dwell here for ever; whilst some of them heap up riches, others seek applause and respect, others labour to advance themselves, others are wholly taken up with pleasures and amusements, others grieve because they are disappointed, and their labours are unrewarded, and the world frowns upon them; the swift and silent flight of days carries them all to the hour when these things cease, or when they have no further use. The children of God, like the children of this world, have their appointed time to employ; like them they pass their days in a place where there is no settled habitation, no certain possession; like them they meet with vicissitudes of ease and pain, of prosperity and adversity; like them they are carried away by the revolutions of days and years to their last end: but to Christians this last end is the dawning to an everlasting day, the entrance into peace and happiness, and the beginning of a life which alone deserves the name of life.

These are motives which reason and revelation offer, to make us contented in our several states. If they have no good effect,

effect, the fault is rather in us than in them; and indeed it is easier to convince the understanding, than to reform the heart and compose the passions. The true method therefore to acquire contentment is to be good, or, if we have offended, to repent and amend: else we may seek it late and early, but we shall not find it. It doth not use to make its abode in wicked minds. It is probable that such persons will not possess it even when they are in a state of prosperity, because guilt is commonly an uneasy thing; but it is most certain that they will not enjoy it when evil of any sort overtakes them; for that is the time when their conscience will give them the most disturbance.

As a careful observance of our duty in general is the best method of acquiring contentment, so there are particular acts of religion which have a more immediate connection with it: such is supplication to God, that he would raise our minds above the world, and scatter those clouds of sadness that overshadow them, and lift up the light of his countenance upon us, and strengthen us against all events, to which humble and earnest addresses, favourable promises of support are made in the Scriptures; such is humility, and a sense of our defects; and such is gratitude for benefits received.

To these we should by all means add industry in our affairs and callings. If you observe the dissatisfied part of mankind, you shall find no small number of them to be indolent and unoccupied. Idleness breeds in them discontent; and discontent increases their aversion from business; and then every thing displeases them. But industry is innocent, pleasant, and profitable; drives out despondence and melancholy by diverting the thoughts, and fixing them on other objects, and by ever presenting to the mind something new, and something useful.

To industry should also be joined a sober and sparing use of those things which are not absolutely requisite to our being, or to our well being; a decent moderation in food, in raiment, in furniture, in equipage, in diversions and amusements. For here again, if you consider the discontented tribe, you shall find that one great cause of their uneasiness arises from their coveting, not the necessities, no, nor yet the conveniencies, but the superfluities of life; it arises from those artificial and

imaginary wants, which are not of God's producing, which the world, the flesh, and the devil, have contrived together to create, which human nature knows not, and which reason and Scripture allow not. All such extravagant cravings bring forth as many moral evils and pernicious effects. Of this wicked and widespread disease the remedy is always at hand, and that remedy is temperance.

And here the present season, and the exhortations of the church, admonish me to recommend to you temperance, and abstinence, abstinence exercised with discretion; and not to dismiss you without some hints upon this subject.

There is, as we may not improperly call it, a perpetual fast, to which we are obliged, as rational creatures and as Christians, namely, a fast from all intemperate affections, turbulent passions, and irregular practices. But there is also an abstinence at particular times from the lawful pleasures of life; and the fitness of such a conduct may easily be proved upon the principles of human reason and common sense. I explain myself by a few instances: your own thoughts may suggest more.

A person in health and good circumstances hath food of various kinds at command. But such is the instability of human affairs, that he may be reduced to a morsel of bread. It is expedient therefore for him, at certain times, to take up with such spare and plain diet, as sufficeth to remove pain, and to satisfy the cravings of the body. He will be better able to shift for himself upon any turn of fortune. I need not add that such abstinence will conduce to preserve his health. No one, I presume, will deny it.

Such a person, it may be, hath various diversions and entertainments at command, and may repair to them as often as he thinks fit. But many accidents may deprive him at a stroke of all these beloved amusements, which are the epidemical disease and infatuation of the present age. Let him learn then how to live without them, by shunning them more frequently, whilst they are in his reach.

Such a person may usually have a variety of company abroad and at home. But various events may reduce him to solitude. Let him then learn beforehand to bear solitude at certain times, to

converse with useful books, with his God, and with his own soul, and think himself in good company.

Whosoever practises such abstinence upon the principles above mentioned, may be said to keep a moral and philosophical fast; but if what he thus saves in his expences, he gives to the needy and deserving, then, and not till then, he converts his rational into a truly religious and Christian fast.

SERMON LVIII.

On Humility.

PET. i. 5.

—Be clothed with humility.

IN my remarks upon the subject of humility, I shall follow the usual method of discoursing upon moral virtues.

I. I will consider the nature and the effects of humility:

II. I will represent the motives and inducements to the practice of it.

I. I will consider its nature and effects, and represent it in these three views:

As it relates to our own private thoughts, and is confined to ourselves:

As it respects our duty to God:

As it influences our conduct towards our neighbour.

Humility, as it relates to our own private thoughts and judgment, requires that we should entertain no better an opinion of ourselves than we deserve. To judge too hardly and severely of ourselves, and to fancy that we are guilty of faults from which we are free, cannot be acts of humility, because there can be no virtue in mistake and ignorance. Only, as we have all a propensity to extenuate our defects, and to over-rate our good deeds, it is safest to err on the other side, to correct this bent by forcing the mind somewhat towards the contrary way, and frequently to review our failings, and the many causes which we have of rejecting all arrogant and conceited thoughts.

Our Maker hath conferred upon us several gifts which we cannot possibly value too much, as long as we acknowledge them to come from him, and endeavour

to make a right use of them. It shews ingratitude and ill-nature to lessen and undervalue the benefits which we receive from our friends; and to behave in this manner towards God, is still more blamable. In forming therefore a mean and despicable opinion of ourselves in particular, and of human nature in general, there may be not only no sound judgment, no modesty, no goodness of any sort, but error, ignorance, malevolence, and depravity of heart.

Some of the unbelieving and irreligious tribe have said, that a persuasion of the soul's immortality and of future rewards arose from the presumption and vanity of man, who being proud and high-minded, fancies himself a more considerable and important animal than he really is; whilst they, throwing aside these prejudices, and aspiring to no such dignity, meekly acknowledge themselves to be brethren to the brutes, and expect after a few days to perish with them. This is humility; but it is so only in a bad sense, in the sense which the Romans used to fix upon the word, intending to express by it a sordid and mean spirit.

Others have affirmed, that man never performs any good action, that all his seeming virtues are real vices, because self-love and a regard to his own interest is at the bottom of them, and conducts him in every step that he takes.

They who entertain such injurious notions of human nature, forfeit all claim to the approbation and esteem of others. Charity itself, which thinketh no evil, cannot judge favourably of those who would transform every thing into vice, and banish all virtue from the earth.

Others, who are much better persons than the former, think that it is God who does all in and for the righteous in an arbitrary and irresistible manner, giving to some and refusing to others that assistance without which every one must perish. And this notion is, as they pretend, the very character of humility; whilst they really, though I will not say designedly, detract from the goodness, and justice, and wisdom of God, and confound the notions of virtue and vice.

Lastly, there are some who have too mean an opinion of their own abilities, and by fancying themselves to be useless, become so, and dare not attempt many things in which they are capable of succeeding,

ceeding, and which they ought to perform. This behaviour arises more from indolence or melancholy than from humility.

Humility then, as it relates to the judgment which we form concerning ourselves, is a due sense of our imperfections; of those which are common to human nature, and of those which are more peculiarly our own.

The imperfections common to human nature are these :

Mortality, which came into the world by sin, and all the bad consequences attending it, a body weak and frail, and exposed to various disorders and diseases, which, as it is united to the soul, hath a great influence upon its operations, and often proves an impediment to its progress towards wisdom and goodness.

A stronger propensity to evil than to good, which all persons at certain times and on certain occasions have experienced, and guilt from some degrees of which none was ever free.

An understanding liable to be frequently deceived, and a knowledge which at the best is much confined.

The infirmities peculiar to ourselves are those defects either in goodness, or in knowledge, or in wisdom, by which we are inferior to other persons.

To be sensible of these weaknesses and faults, is humility, as it relates to ourselves; to lessen or overlook them, is pride.

Let us now consider the effects which humility produces towards God.

Here it is also necessary to distinguish between true and false humility. That God is most just and holy, and that we are sinners, that the gospel contains a perfect rule of righteousness, and that the best of us in many things transgress this rule; these are truths of which we ought to have a serious and a constant sense.

But there are here also extremes which should be avoided; for we may form too abject and too bad an opinion of ourselves, or we may represent God as a most strict and severe and inexorable master, or we may imagine that a perfection which we are not able to acquire, is enjoined to us as necessary to salvation, or we may fear that repentance and amendment shall avail us nothing; or we may make religion to consist principally in a set of trifling and difficult rules, from which if

we swerve, our mistaken conscience will condemn us. Such notions as these have in a greater or a lesser degree possessed many minds, and hence hath arisen a slavish dread and horror of God, and a devotion over-run with superstition and uncommanded austerities. This is not humility, but ignorance; abject fear and religious melancholy.

True and rational humility, as it influences our behaviour towards our Maker, produces a religious awe, and banishes presumption and carelessness and vain-glory. The humble person, considering the perfections of God, and comparing them with his own imperfections, approaches him with reverence, and acknowledges himself unworthy of his favour, and unable without his assistance to perform his duty, to obtain either temporal conveniences or eternal life. He trusts not to his own heart, or wisdom, or strength. He frequently recollects and confesses his omissions and transgressions, and uses them as motives to greater industry and watchfulness. He receives temporal good from the hands of God with gratitude; and temporal evil with resignation, as a correction which he deserves, as a trial of his obedience, and as intended for his benefit.

The effects which humility produces in our behaviour towards men are now to be considered; and here also the same distinction is to be repeated which was made before, namely, that there is a deceitful and false humility which ought to be avoided. Thus some speak contemptibly of themselves, and pretend that they are ignorant of things in which they are well-skilled, and acknowledge themselves inferior to those whom they surpass; some pay a servile deference to the opinions and directions of others, and dare not use that reason and understanding which God has given them; some shun the conversation of their equals, and chuse companions of the lowest sort; and all these persons either fancy themselves to be humble, or would be accounted so by the world. Yet in such a conduct there may be no humility and modesty, but hypocrisy, or affectation, or bigotry, or a meanness of spirit mixed with pride and vanity.

Between an unmanly contempt and disregard of ourselves, with an abject fear and blind reverence of others, which is one extreme, and a proud, conceited, overbearing

overbearing insolence, which is the other extreme, true humility proceeds always uniform and decent.

The humble person never assumes what belongs not to him; he desires to possess no more power, and to receive no more respect and compliance from others than is suitable to his own character and condition, and appointed by the laws and customs of society.

He is not a rigid exactor of the things to which he has an undoubted right; he can overlook and excuse many faults: he is not greatly disturbed and provoked at those slights and affronts which put vain and haughty persons out of all patience.

He is easy and quiet in his station, though he may deserve a better; not inclined to trouble the world with complaints and solicitations.

He can behold the success, much more the abilities and virtues, of others with the same even temper, and is not disposed to hate, or slander, or envy them upon that account.

The good and useful qualities with which he is endued he employs in a prudent and unaffected manner, neither concealing them when they ought to appear, nor putting them forth for the sake of applause.

He is obedient to his superiors in things just and lawful, rendering tribute to whom tribute is due, custom to whom custom, fear to whom fear, honour to whom honour.

He is dutiful to his parents, teachers, and masters, courteous towards his equals, condescending towards his inferiors, merciful and placable towards his enemies, gentle and patient towards those who are in error, or overtaken in a fault.

He is candid in his judgment, and more inclined, when there is any room for it, to think and speak favourably than hardly.

He exercises power, if it be committed to him, with justice and impartiality, tempered with as much forbearance and lenity as is consistent with the public good.

II. The nature of humility has been considered. Let us now, secondly, consider the motives to the practice of it.

1. Humility is a virtue so excellent, that the Scriptures have in some sort ascribed it even to God himself.

Humility is a right opinion and estimate of ourselves, producing a suitable behaviour towards others. But as in ourselves we find much imperfection, a dependence always upon God, and often upon men, and no good quality which we can call entirely our own, and for which we are not indebted to our Maker; hence it is that humility consists principally in a due sense of our defects, our transgressions, our wants, and the obligations which we have received. Therefore such humility cannot be in God, in Him who possesses all perfections. But there is a part of humility, as it relates to our behaviour towards men, called condescension; and this is sometimes represented in Scripture as a disposition not unworthy of the Divine Nature. *The Lord is high above all, his glory is above the heavens; yet he humbleth himself to behold the things that are in heaven and earth.* Again; *Though the Lord be high, yet hath he respect unto the lowly.* Again; *Lord, what is man, that thou art mindful of him; and the son of man, that thou visitest him?* that is, that thou condescendest to take notice and care of him. This condescension is ascribed to God, not as if it were an occupation below him, or unworthy of his power and wisdom; but because a like behaviour in men towards their inferiors is called condescension. And in us it is called condescension, because we descend, not from our dignity, but from that false and foolish superiority and state which vain and conceited persons usurp and maintain.

2. The example of our Saviour is an example of every virtue, particularly of humility. He himself calls upon us to observe and imitate it, to come and learn of him to be meek, lowly in heart, patient, calm, and condescending.

His humility appears in most of the actions and circumstances of his life; in his birth, by which he became the child of a parent not less poor than virtuous; in the obscurity which he chose till he entered into his ministry; in his care to conceal his dignity, upon most occasions; in his submission to the ceremonial law, to the civil government, to wicked magistrates, to extreme want, and to extreme sufferings, in continually promoting, not his own glory, but the glory and honour of his Father; in his behaviour towards those
who

who sought him, and towards those whom he himself took the pains to seek and to save, towards the ignorant and the mistaken, the sorrowful and penitent, the sick and needy, towards his friends and followers, and towards his accusers, betrayers, slanderers, persecutors, and murderers.

3. In the behaviour of the angels, as it is revealed to us in the Scriptures, we find that part of humility called condescension, or a willing and cheerful submission to any offices by which the good of others may be promoted. We are there taught that they have been, and that they always are ready, at God's appointment, to guide, to direct, to succour, to comfort, to instruct, to assist, to relieve, to protect and deliver good men. Thus are they ministering spirits; and in the intercourse between us and them, the labour and the attendance is theirs, the profit is ours; we are ministered unto, and they minister. Hence we must learn to think it no disgrace to be, as our Lord says he was, the servants of all; to be occupied in procuring the ease, the improvement, the welfare, and the happiness of our brethren, and to account no acts base and mean, which produce so noble and excellent effects. In truth, we cannot be more creditably employed; nor can the holy angels better show the excellence of their nature, than in thus stooping to our necessities; for it is more blessed, and more honourable too, to give than to receive. They bestow upon us substantial benefits, and we can return them nothing besides reverence and gratitude. Whosoever best imitates these holy spirits in humility and condescension towards his inferiors, approaches nearest to them in dignity; and whilst he abases himself, his actions exalt him.

4. It is affirmed in many places of Scripture, that humility secures to us the favour of God, and will bring down his blessing upon ourselves and our undertakings.

He that humbleth himself shall be exalted; with the lowly is wisdom: before honour is humility: honour shall uphold the humble in spirit: God shall save the humble: he giveth grace to the lowly, and exalteth the humble and meek: whosoever shall humble himself as a little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven: thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, I dwell in the

high and holy place; with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to this man will I look, even to him that is poor, and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word: them that are meek will God guide in judgment, and such as are gentle, them will he teach his way: he hath hidden the most valuable knowledge (that is, religious knowledge) from the wise and prudent, and hath revealed it unto babes.

From these passages we may observe that humility is highly acceptable to God; in general, because it is a virtue; in particular, because it disposes men to receive with modest submission the great truths of religion, to be willing to receive instruction, to yield to reason, and when there is sufficient evidence that a doctrine or precept is from God, to believe and observe it.

5. Humility usually gains the esteem and love of men, and consequently the conveniencies, at least the necessities of life. Every one who has even slightly observed what passes in the world, must see and know this. Since all love themselves, they will probably approve and favour those who never provoke, insult, deride, or injure them, who shew them respect and civility, and do them good offices. The humble person therefore takes the surest way to recommend himself to those with whom he is joined in society, to increase the number of his well-wishers and friends, and to escape or defeat the assaults of detraction, envy, and malice. This amiable quality will stand by him, will be a protector and benefactor to him in all stations, and through all his days, particularly when he first enters into business and appears in public. Then the want of this one virtue is enough to ruin the person who stands so much in need of assistance, instruction, and recommendation. He who is young and unexperienced, proud and insolent, will scarcely be able to improve either his mind or his fortunes, and if he falls, will fall unpitied.

6. Such are the present advantages which humility usually secures to us from God and from men; usually, I say, but not constantly; because it is possible that an humble person may be neglected by the world, and that God may not interpose in his behalf, and may defer his reward to the next life. Therefore the most certain present recompense of humility is that which arises

arises from its own nature, and with which it repays the mind that entertains it; and a very valuable recompense it would be, though it were the only one allotted to this virtue.

An humble person neither hates nor envies any one; therefore he is free from those very turbulent and uneasy vices which are always a punishment to themselves.

He is not discomposed by the slights or censures of others. If he has undesignedly given some occasion for them, he amends the fault: if he deserves them not, he regards them as little.

He is contented with his condition, if it be tolerable: and therefore he finds satisfaction in all that is good, and overlooks and in some measure escapes all that is inconvenient in it.

He has a due sense of his unworthiness and defects, by which he is taught to bear calamities with patience and submission, and thereby to soften their harsh nature, and to allay their violence.

He is free from pride and ambition; therefore he never sacrifices his integrity, his honour, and his peace of mind, those substantial blessings, to the splendid trifles which are the objects of pride and ambition. He desires not to obtain them at all, much less to obtain them in the common way, by sordid flattery, by sinful compliances, by dissimulation, by lying and flandering, by deceiving and over-reaching, by violence and oppression, by loss of time, by useless occupations, by dangerous attempts, by profusion and extravagance, by methods which have been pernicious to the fortunes, to the body, and to the mind of multitudes.

7. Lastly, from the account which we have given of humility, we may draw this conclusion, that it is not, as the insolent and haughty are inclined to imagine, an unmanly and sordid disposition. It is true that the word humility is used by Latin writers in a bad sense for meanness of spirit; but the pagans were not ignorant of this virtue, and have recommended it; only they gave it another name. Christianity indeed hath taught

us juster notions of humility than they commonly entertained; for they usually considered humility, which they called Modesty, or Moderation, as a social virtue, as it influenced our behaviour towards ourselves and towards men; but humility towards God few of them seem to have sufficiently apprehended. It is indeed a virtue so remote from meanness of spirit, that it is no bad sign of a great and exalted mind. An humble person is one who is neither puffed up with approbation and applause, nor greatly provoked or disturbed by censure and ill usage, who envies none placed above him, and despises none below him, who dares examine his own conduct, and condemn whatsoever is faulty in it, who is gentle to others and severe to himself, who desires to obtain no more than he deserves, who can quit even that also, if his duty requires it, who is contented to act the part which Providence allots to him, who is free from irregular self-love, that is, from one of the most insinuating and prevailing weaknesses of mankind, which may not improperly be called the inner garment of the soul, the first which it puts on, and the last which it puts off. If this be not, it will be hard to say what is greatness of mind.

On the contrary, if we would know what meanness of spirit is, and how it acts, let us look for it amongst the proud and insolent, and we shall not lose our labour. A proud man is one who is glad to receive homage and flattery, though it be offered to him by the most ignorant or worthless, and cannot bear contempt even from them; who therefore is the servant or slave of all, not in a good sense, but because his happiness depends upon their opinion and behaviour; who has no heart to own his obligations to God and man, whose life and conduct is one continual lie, who assumes good qualities which he has not, and is blind to his own faults; who desires to possess what he should not, and what he often cannot obtain; and who is much dissatisfied when he is disappointed. These are the persons who despise humility, and by despising recommend it.

S E R M O N L I X .

On our Duty to God, our Neighbour,
and ourselves.

TITUS, ii. 11, 12.

The grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, teaching us, that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world.

THE gospel of Jesus Christ, saith St. Paul, is revealed to us, and the design of it is, to teach and enable us to behave ourselves here in such a manner that we may obtain eternal life. Thus the words of the text contain in them a compendious representation of the whole duty of man, namely, faith and good works.

What relates to faith is rather intimated than expressed; but it is very plainly intimated, for since this perfect rule of life is discovered by the gospel, doubtless we must receive the gospel, and assent to it, and this is faith.

As to practice, we must live soberly, righteously, and godly. Sobriety contains our duty to ourselves, righteousness our duty to our neighbour, and godliness our duty to God; and these duties are closely connected, and often coincide with one another and with Christian faith.

I shall at present consider that part of our duty which relates more directly to God, and is called godliness, though the word godliness or piety often stands for all religion in general.

In the first place, then, Christianity commands us to believe that there is one God, the Creator and Father of all. This is the foundation of religion; faith in God is the ground and support of all goodness, and may itself in some sense be accounted a virtue, since it ariseth from sober consideration, from a regard to truth and goodness, and must be kept alive by the same means; and since a vicious and debauched mind is strongly disposed to doubt whether there be an invisible Creator and Lord of all, and to wish that there were none.

A belief in God is faith, and not sight, because the object of it is He who is not to be perceived by our senses, or comprehended by our imagination; but it is a faith founded upon reason, and supported by convincing arguments, of which the most plain and fami-

liar are the frame and order and disposition of the visible world, the general consent of mankind, and the general usefulness of the doctrine itself, which is adapted to do us good, and which cannot possibly do us any harm.

Moreover, the Christian religion teacheth us to entertain just and honourable notions of God's perfections, both those which we commonly call natural perfections, such as eternity and infinite power; and those which we call moral perfections, as holiness, justice, goodness, and mercy. The Scriptures frequently remind us of both, as being proper to excite in us a fear and a love of God.

They cannot be said to entertain right conceptions of the Deity who extol his power, and his absolute and uncontrollable dominion over his creatures; but represent him at the same time as ruling in a way which, in any other being, we should call arbitrary and cruel. This can never be reconciled with the common notions of holiness, justice, and goodness; nor with the Scriptures, which represent God as love itself, who is good to all, and whose tender mercies are over all his works. It was long ago observed, that there never was any opinion, how absurd soever, which was not maintained by some or other of the ancient philosophers; but yet there are not to be found even amongst them any such hateful sentiments concerning God's transactions with men. To suppose that God hath doomed his creatures to eternal misery for being in a state of sin, which they cannot avoid, and out of which he will not help them, this, I say, is such a manifest contradiction to the divine perfections, that no men could possibly have entertained it, if they had not misunderstood some texts of Scripture, and taken it for a doctrine of revealed religion.

They who entertain just thoughts of God, and declare them upon all proper occasions, may be said to hallow or sanctify his name, which that all persons may do, we are taught by our Saviour to wish in our daily prayers. In this the gentiles failed greatly, who ascribed to their deities human vices, and honoured them with impure and cruel rites. The Jews were not entirely free from fault in this respect, being much inclined to represent God as caring only for their nation, and regardless of the gentiles; and indeed all Christians

Christians have not sufficiently avoided the same errors.

These things are of the more importance, because they who judge amiss concerning the perfections and the government of God, are much inclined to imitate all the defects which they ascribe to him.

It is a great violation of our duty to God, to interpose his holy name in things of no consequence, or, which is far worse, in confirmation of things which are false. Therefore our Lord hath not only forbidden perjury, but oaths upon trivial occasions; even those oaths, in which care was taken to avoid mentioning the name of God. Whosoever understands how sacred the divine Majesty is, and how many and how great benefits we have received, and have room to hope and expect from our Creator, cannot think of him without the deepest reverence, and will never name him in a rash and ludicrous manner, nor call upon him to be witness to a falsehood. This wicked behaviour was frequent amongst both Jews and gentiles, and is no less frequent amongst persons who call themselves Christians; but it hath been detested and condemned by all serious and wise men in all times and places.

With this reverence towards God is joined a love to him. If we have any sense of his goodness and favour towards us his unworthy creatures, we cannot refuse him our love. This love consists, first, in a grateful sense of his benefits; secondly, in a desire of pleasing him, which shall be strong and active enough to overcome all contrary desires, so that our heart shall not be divided between God and any object which God condemns. This duty Moses enjoined, and our Saviour enforced, and represented as the first and great commandment.

Other love towards God than this the Scriptures know not: they never recommend those warm transports and that bold familiarity which some zealots affect; nor that refined and mysterious devotion which another sort of visionaries require, who say that we must love God for himself alone, and without any regard to the benefits we receive from him; for, first, the love of God is reason and not passion, reverence and not presumption; secondly, it is gratitude, and we love him because he first loved us.

The love of God cannot lie concealed in the breast, but will shine forth, and shew itself by good works, particularly by a love of mankind, as the Scriptures assure us. Without this behaviour, in vain do we profess to love God, who requires of us real proofs, and not idle words.

There is a worship which is due to God alone. Worship, or adoration, when it means a religious duty paid to God, is of two kinds. There is a worship of the body, and there is a worship of the mind. By the worship of the body, which hath been various in various times and places, is to be understood an humble posture, by which persons intend to acknowledge the supreme dominion of him to whom this reverence is paid. By the worship or adoration of the mind, is meant that submissive disposition, by which we own and profess, that He whom we adore is endued with all perfections, and that we depend wholly upon him, and from him expect all our happiness. Therefore God, as he is the Creator, the Lord, the Protector, and the Father of all, ordered himself alone to be adored in this manner, both in body and spirit; which our Saviour hath also confirmed, when he said to Satan, *It is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve*; him only, in opposition to false gods; for, as St. Paul says, *though there be that are called gods, whether in heaven or in earth, as there be gods many and lords many, yet to us there is but one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we to him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we by him*. And our Saviour saith, *that the Father hath committed all judgment to the Son, that all men may honour the Son as they honour the Father*.

The Gentiles notoriously transgressed this commandment, worshipping any thing, and every thing; as if it were lawful for mortal men to confer divine honours upon this or that object, as flattery or fancy should direct; than which nothing more absurd could easily be imagined, nor more injurious to the majesty of God.

The law and the gospel teach us, that in God alone our confidence should be placed, because he alone can and will do all things for us, and will never deceive our reasonable hopes, whilst in created beings there is neither that all-commanding

ing power, nor that invariable will of doing good, nor that never-failing constancy in performing promises. So that reliance or trust is no inconsiderable part of our duty towards God. It relates in some degree to the things of this life, which God promiseth to his servants, so far as he judgeth fit, and conducing to their true interest. But it principally hath in view the endless happiness of the next world, which we should account to be our chief good.

And because our Lord hath given us clearer promises of life eternal than had been revealed before, and confirmed them by many proofs, and by his own glorious resurrection and ascension, the reliance which we place in God should be proportionably stronger and steadier. This reliance is a part of Christian faith, and is connected with obedience; and hence we may see that faith is deservedly extolled by the sacred Writers, since it contains in itself, or in its genuine effects, the whole duty of man.

Since in many things we all offend, since we ought to deplore our omissions and commissions, and to wish that we may perform a better service for the future; since we are continually contending with temptations, by which if we be finally overcome, we have no longer a claim to the promises of the gospel, God hath commanded us to address ourselves to him for the pardon and the succour of which we stand in need. He wanteth not our prayers, to be informed of our weaknesses and necessities, or to be intreated and importuned as a difficult master, who will sell his favours upon no other terms. Nothing moved him to create us but his own nature overflowing with beneficence. He hath granted us many blessings, which we had no notion of requesting; as redemption by Christ, the knowledge of the gospel, and all the benefits which arise from these, and are connected with them. He hath imposed upon us the duty of prayer purely for our own sakes, and to make us better and happier. For when we pray to him, we call to mind our past follies and offences, and at the same time his infinite goodness, which forgives them upon our repentance, and we become sensible that we depend upon him in all respects, whence naturally arise gratitude towards so kind a benefactor, and earnest desires to obey and please him. Hence

also will this consideration present itself to us, that if the compassionate and placable nature of God be so amiable, and in our sight the brightest and the fairest of all the divine perfections, we ought to imitate it in our behaviour towards others, and be merciful even as he is merciful, and, like him, forgive those who trespass against us.

Three things are requisite to make our prayers acceptable to God:

First, We must ask of God the things which are really and invariably good; such as the knowledge of moral and religious truth, the remission of sins, the divine assistance, and eternal life, all which are intimately united, and neither can or ought to be separated. For other good things we are permitted to ask; but this exception is always to be made or understood, that God would supply our wants, and satisfy our natural and innocent desires, in such a measure and manner as shall seem best to him, who knoweth better than we what is expedient for us.

Secondly, We must make our requests to God with acquiescence and humility. We must not prescribe to him what he should grant us; nor ever repine and murmur, if temporal blessings be withholden from us.

Thirdly, We must be fully sensible that we can have no certain access to him, no security of his favour, unless we endeavour to conform our behaviour to his precepts; for it is not reasonable that he should comply with the requests of those who refuse to comply with his holy will. Thus much our Saviour intimates, when he directs us to ask in his name. To ask in the name of Christ is the same thing as to profess before God that we are indeed the disciples and the servants of his Son, and upon that account to beg and to hope that he will extend his goodness towards us. But no person can have any pretence to make use of the name of Christ, who pays no regard to the conditions which Christ requires of his followers.

And because the love of our neighbour is not less our duty than the love of God, therefore we are taught to extend our prayers beyond our own private necessities; and whatsoever blessings we would gladly receive ourselves, we should also wish for all mankind.

Vehemence and earnestness is commendable in our prayers; but it is then only

only commendable when we ask for life eternal, and for the means conducing to it. A strong desire and a warm importunity to be delivered from temporal calamities, or to be enriched with temporal blessings, is a temper to which religion hath made no favourable promises. St. Paul earnestly besought the Lord that he might be delivered from the angel of Satan who buffeted him. But this request was not granted, because it was more to his true advantage to labour under that inconvenience, whatsoever it was, than to be freed from it. And he, as a wise and good man, acquiesced in the divine will.

Although the Jews were furnished both with precepts and with examples of prayer in the books of Moses and of the Prophets, yet was this duty neither completely taught, nor perfectly understood, because the express and literal promises in the law were temporal; so that they seldom seem to have asked for any thing higher, but only, as to things spiritual, to have requested in general for the favour of God. And yet the good men, who lived under that dispensation, were certainly not without hopes of a better state beyond the grave, and trusted in God that he would in some manner provide for them hereafter, according to his wisdom and goodness. We do not find in the books of the Old Testament every thing that is requisite to set the nature of prayer in a true light and to the best advantage; and we must make some suitable abatements and allowances on account of the more imperfect knowledge of those times. However, we find in those sacred writings many excellent examples of piety, of humility, of religious trust and confidence in God. The wiser pagans have also made some good observations concerning prayer; and particularly they have remarked, that men ought not rashly to ask of the Deity whatsoever their childish and irregular and ignorant desires lead them to wish. They have recommended this short form of prayer, which certainly is modest and judicious; Grant us, O Lord, the things which are good for us, whether we ask, or ask not, for them; and the things which would be hurtful, withhold from us, though we should ask for them. But, besides that the wiser pagans had some false notions concerning the Deity, the common sort observed no rules of decency and prudence in their prayers. So that

Christianity in this, as in many other respects, greatly surpassed the religion of the wisest pagans and Jews.

With our prayers to God are to be joined praises and thanksgivings to him for his glorious works, and for all the great and lasting benefits which with a liberal hand he pours down upon men. The Psalms of David, and indeed all the books of the holy Scriptures, are full of exhortations to celebrate the power and wisdom and clemency of God. The thing is of itself most reasonable, and whilst we perform it sincerely and heartily, we daily find the good effects of it. For, besides the perpetual exercise of gratitude, the oftener we consider in our minds and distinctly examine the benefits and the works of God, the more easily we are induced to obey him, and the more effectually deterred from a vicious life. And this is one great reason why God requires from us these acts of piety towards him. No benefit and profit can accrue to him from our praises and thanks; nor would he be the less happy, though we passed over all his favours in stupid silence. Therefore it is for our own sakes that God demands this easy tribute from us. He is indeed said in Scripture to have made and done all for his own glory and praise; but the profit and the benefit of honouring him redound upon us. True it is that God is pleased with our piety, and our dutiful returns, because they are suitable both to his nature and to our own. He hath made all things for his own honour; this was one end: but another end was, that he might exercise his unspeakable goodness towards all objects capable of receiving it.

The writers of the gospels teach us to obey the divine precepts, not as slaves who fear a passionate, unreasonable, and rigid master, but as children who cheerfully comply with the directions and advice of a kind parent, which they know to be intended for their good.

But though the gospel in this respect surpasseth the Jewish dispensation, and treats us as sons, and brings us into a state of liberty, we must not imagine that the service which it demands is something slight and superficial, and requiring no pains and application; for it orders us to put off inordinate desires and evil affections, and, if it should ever prove necessary, to lay down and lose all, rather than to part with our religion,

ligion, and offend God. Such an obedience is indeed difficult to those who are inclined to a slothful security, and love the world immoderately, and are not deeply affected with the rewards and punishments of the next state: but it may be practised by those who can govern themselves, and who have a lively sense of the great advantages present and future which are secured by piety; and by such it is more easily observed than a heavy multitude of rites and ceremonies.

This Christian obedience is described in the New Testament by different words and expressions. Sometimes it is called, to love God, sometimes to fear and reverence him. We may be said to love God, when we think honourably of him, gratefully acknowledge his goodness, and prefer his commands to all other considerations. The fear of God is a fear left, by an improper behaviour, we should shew ourselves unthankful to our best benefactor; it is a fear lest we should incur his displeasure, not only because he can deprive us of happiness, and inflict punishments upon us, but principally because he is so good to us, and imposes nothing upon us which it is not our interest to perform.

Christ also required of his followers to shew openly their faith and love and reverence towards God, to confess their Saviour before men, upon all proper occasions, to excite others to the same disposition and behaviour, and to meet together for the exercise of religious duties. He also declared, that wheresoever his servants should be assembled together in his name, he would be spiritually with them. He also promised that his church should never be destroyed, that it should last till the consummation of all things; which promise he hath hitherto fulfilled for more than seventeen hundred years. As to the order and method that should be observed in such assemblies, he gave no particular precepts, but left it to his Apostles. Religious government, like civil government, is absolutely necessary in some form or other; but all forms of government are in their own nature indifferent, and so Christian nations have a right to appoint that which suits them best, remembering the direction of the Apostle, *Let all things be done decently and in order.*

And because men are more affected with actions than with words, and all religions had their ceremonies, it was fit that

Christians should have something of this kind. Therefore Christ appointed two religious rites, but very easy, very plain, and simple, and most remote from vain pomp, or superstition, by which Christians should profess their belief in him, acknowledge themselves his servants, keep his benefits in remembrance, and declare their friendship for each other. One was Baptism, which was no new thing to the Jews, for it had been practised by them, and also by John the Baptist; nor was it less known to the gentiles. By this ceremony of initiation, Christians declared themselves servants of God, and of Christ, and of the Holy Ghost; were reminded that they must cleanse themselves from iniquity, and live a more pure and holy life; and that as they descended into the water and rose up from it, so they must die to sin and rise again to righteousness. The other was the Lord's Supper, which he instituted in memory of his death, and which shews, that they who eat together of the same bread, and drink of the same cup, should account each other as brethren who belong to one family. At the same time Christians profess that they continue in that covenant which Christ ratified by his blood, and that they will endeavour to obey his precepts, and to follow his example. These are ceremonies easy to be performed, and as easy to be understood, if we will content ourselves with the account which the writers of the New Testament have given of them.

From all that hath been said it appears that the end and design of religion was not to afflict and oppress us, but to make us happy. God can take no pleasure in the miseries and sorrows of men: he created us to do us good, not to do us harm. He gave us freedom of action, without which we could neither practise nor understand virtue; but the consequence of freedom is, that we are changeable, and capable of transgressing. Therefore he hath also given us laws, instructions, motives, encouragements, and assistances. It must be confessed, that no man, except our Saviour, ever performed the whole of his duty so perfectly, that he could claim rewards from God on that account. But God requireth not of his servants this sublime holiness; he requires of them that they should preserve themselves from obstinate impenitence and from vicious habits, and when they have tres-

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passed, that they should repent and amend. Great reason have they therefore to return him continual thanks, and to acknowledge his infinite mercy, which thus stoops and condescends to their infirmity.

If God, without any apparent cause for it, had required of men costly gifts and sacrifices, which might have reduced them to poverty, and the observation of difficult and unimproving ceremonies, these indeed would have been hard laws: but the Christian religion imposeth nothing like this upon us. If the gentiles believed that such things were required from them, they fell into such errors through their own fault, through the mean conceptions which they entertained concerning the Deity. If the Jews were in some measure burdened with laws of this nature, the reason was, because they had corrupted themselves, and fallen into many of the errors of the gentiles, so that God, as a lawgiver, was obliged, if we may use that expression, to give them precepts suitable, not so much to his own nature, and to the dictates of reason, as to their carnal minds and stubborn temper. And yet he, by his prophets, instructed them in the superior excellence of morality, and invited them to repentance, with favourable promises of pardon and acceptance, and unfolded to them the spiritual part of religion at intervals and by degrees, as they were capable of receiving it. So that in this also they had great reason to praise and celebrate his long-suffering and goodness.

Thus much may suffice concerning our duty to God, as far as it may be distinguished from our duty to our neighbour and to ourselves.

S E R M O N LX.

The same Subject continued.

TITUS, ii. 11, 12.

The grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, teaching us, that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world.

WE are here exhorted by the Apostle to live soberly, righteously, and godly. Sobriety comprehends our duty to ourselves, righteousness our duty to our neighbour, and godliness our duty to God.

I proceed now to consider that part of our duty which relates to our neighbour, and which is here called, living righteously or justly. Righteousness frequently means all religion in general; but as it stands in the text distinguished from godliness and sobriety, it means our duty to our neighbour, which in other places of the New Testament is called brotherly love or charity.

1. Under these names of righteousness, of love, and of charity, the gospel comprehends all those kind offices which we ought to perform towards others. This friendly behaviour is called love, because if we love a person, first, we never envy him, or hurt him knowingly and willfully but, secondly, wish him all happiness, and assist him as far as we are able; under which two heads is comprehended our duty to our neighbour. This our Saviour commands, when he explains and improves that precept of the law, *Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself*. The same thing he expresses in other words thus: *Whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, do ye so unto them*. The same precept is to be found in the book of Tobit, in a form of prohibition; *Do that to no man which thou hatest*. The meaning is, Whatsoever we should certainly and reasonably expect from another, if we were in his circumstances, and he in ours, that we ought to do to him; and whatsoever we should account ill usage, if we suffered it, that we ought not to do. Concerning this charity, or brotherly affection, St. Paul hath discoursed in his First Epistle to the Corinthians, and hath given it the preference even to faith and to hope. A virtue so reasonable could not be unknown to the pagans; their wise men have also recommended it, though they call it by other names, and have not extended it so far as our Saviour hath.

2. Mutual justice and equity are required from us. Justice is that virtue by which we give to every man what is his due by the law of nature, and by the laws of civil society, and abstain from all injury either in word or in deed, in omission or in commission. Thus far justice proceeds: equity goes still farther; for there are many things which our country requires not of us, and for neglecting which none can call us before the magistrate, which yet an equitable person cannot omit without condemning himself. These sort of duties

duties depend upon a great variety of circumstances, of facts, of persons, of times and places, which may be such, that it would be unreasonable to act according to strict right, though the laws would give us leave to do it.

3. The gospel requires that we should be charitable towards all persons, as far as we are able, and they are deserving, by shewing them favour and countenance, by using our interest in their behalf, by giving them our help, and by relieving their wants, especially when they are reduced to straits, and unable to provide for themselves.

It is not possible to fix the exact bounds and limits of such liberality, especially in countries like this, where the laws of the land have made a stated and a large provision for the poor; so that this public charity is at the same time the private charity of every person who willingly discharges his part and proportion. What is to be done beyond this, must in a great measure be left to every one's discretion. To do more than this, is certainly the duty of several persons; and the truest objects of such charity are often they who neither ask it nor receive it from the public. Our Saviour, in the gospel of St. Luke, commands us to give alms of such things as we have, that is, according to our present circumstances, and proportionably to our fortunes; which being a general direction, and not descending to particulars, we have no right, that I can discern, to burden the consciences of others with fixed rules about it. Only we are to exhort them to take care that they fall not short of our Saviour's intention. The ancient Christians remarkably fulfilled these precepts, which was no small credit to them and their religion, and greatly conduced to recommend the gospel to the world, and to further its progress.

4. The gospel requires of us, in a singular manner, humanity and meekness. Humanity teacheth us to temper all our words and actions towards our neighbour with civility and goodness, and to abstain carefully from all severe and harsh expressions, all cross and rude behaviour. Meekness restrains our anger, and keeps it in due bounds, so that we neither fly out into an unseemly passion at the faults of others, nor into railing and reviling, nor harbour malice and revenge in our hearts. We are all of us offended at insolence,

contempt, anger, and ill usage; we are pleased when we meet with a contrary behaviour; and consequently this dislike and this approbation should be a rule to us in our conduct towards others. Therefore Christ condemns anger and its effects, and shews, that he gives a more excellent precept than is contained in the Mosaic law; for, having observed that the law forbade murder, *Thou shalt not kill*; he adds, *but I say unto you, that whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause, shall be in danger of the judgment*. This is to be understood of unjust and immoderate anger, which is joined with a desire of revenge, or with a proud and ill-grounded scorn of our neighbour: for we may be angry, when the cause is just, when we keep our anger within due bounds, when it hath no other aim than self-preservation, when it is accompanied with a design of reforming the offender, and not of doing him an injury, and when it excludes not a readiness to forgive him, and to be reconciled to him upon his amendment. *Be ye angry, and sin not*, says St. Paul; *and let not the sun go down upon your wrath;—but let all bitterness, and clamour, and evil-speaking, be put away from you, with all malice*. Christ himself was filled with anger and indignation against some of the Jews; but at the same time he was ready to be reconciled to them, and to receive them favourably, if they would have returned to their duty, and his last words were a prayer to God to forgive them.

By meekness and humanity contentions and quarrels are avoided, with all their pernicious consequences, and the friendship, good-will, and esteem of the world is usually secured. But care is to be taken, that, instead of these virtues, we fall not into those vices which have a resemblance of them, and lie concealed under that fair and false appearance: such is a feigned civility and complaisance, which often covers a base and perfidious heart; flattery, which is as ready to commend or excuse vice, as to praise what is praise-worthy; and a mean compliance which approves, or seems to approve, the worst of actions. These are as hurtful as meekness and humanity are useful to society.

These virtues St. Paul hath in view, when in his Epistle to the Romans he exhorts Christians, *in honour to prefer one another*, to shew respect and civility to others, without

waiting to see whether they will shew as much to us. And St. Peter's direction is, *Honour all men*. If therefore rudeness and inhumanity, and harshness of behaviour, be found in Christians, and in Christians who pretend to great holiness and zeal and piety, this is not to be laid to the charge of Christianity, or of those who first preached it; but it is the fault of those who understand not, or are not willing to understand, the plain precepts of the gospel.

5. To these virtues is fitly joined the love of peace and concord, both in things relating to this world, and in things relating to religion, whether they be matters of belief, or rites and ceremonies and discipline. But as all virtues have a natural union, and can never disagree, without ceasing to be what they are, the love of peace must always be joined with the love of truth and righteousness; and concord is to be so pursued, that we injure not the duty which we owe to God and to ourselves. The regard due to peace requires of every person, that he seek not only his own particular profit and convenience, but the advantage of others, and the common good of society; and by such methods public peace is settled and preserved.

But because every person hath his own private possessions, without which he cannot support himself and his family, it is impossible for us to live in concord with those who endeavour to wrong and defraud us; we must at least avoid such a person, as an enemy with whom we can hold no intercourse: and likewise if any one by threats and violence would force us to act contrary to truth and virtue, even the sincerest lover of peace must renounce all society with such a tyrant, lest he should give up those things which in their own nature are most excellent and most useful to mankind, and which God hath expressly commanded us never to forsake. *If it be possible, says the Apostle, as far as in you lieth, live peaceable with all men: as far as reason and religion permit, be at peace with others, and let not matters of small consequence, or those faults and defects from which none is entirely free, interrupt and destroy that union.*

Christians are members of two societies; as they are men, they belong to the country in which they are born or settled; and as they are Christians, they belong to the

church of Christ. But as this church universal, or catholic church, is dispersed over the earth, and cannot assemble together, it was even from ancient times divided into particular and national churches. Every Christian then should be desirous and willing to join himself to his own national church, if he can do it with a safe conscience; and in this affair, he should not give way to small and endless scruples, nor expect that every thing should be conducted exactly as he could wish; for perfection dwelleth not here below, and wise men must either bear with some things which they do not approve and cannot mend, or they must form a religion for themselves and serve God all alone, which is by no means agreeable with mutual edification and with the social nature of Christianity.

But when things are come to such a pass in any nation, that Christians are required to reject and abjure evident truths, to approve monstrous absurdities and flagrant contradictions, to sacrifice reason and common sense to a thing most improperly called faith, and to pay a blind and slavish obedience to the doctrines, and to the false doctrines of men, such a church cannot be accounted a truly religious society, nor is it lawful to hold communion with her. For these and other weighty reasons, our ancestors separated themselves from the court and the see of Rome, and began the reformation.

The Apostles, at first, did not separate themselves from the Jews, though they differed greatly from them, as long as they were permitted in the synagogues to profess their belief in Christ, to preach his doctrine, and to reject every thing contrary to it; but when this liberty was no longer granted to them, they held their own assemblies apart, and forsook the synagogue. After this, some dissension arose in the Christian congregations which were formed of converted Jews and gentiles; for the Jews stuck obstinately to their old rites and ceremonies, and the gentiles refused to observe them. But because in other respects the gospel was obeyed by both, and neither were compelled to do any thing that they held to be unlawful, this difference of opinion was to be mutually tolerated, as St. Paul declares. As for himself, *to the weak he became weak, that he might gain the weak: he was made all things to all men, that he might*
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by all means save some. The meaning is, that he thought it a part of Christian prudence to comply with his brethren in matters indifferent, and to gratify them in all things consistent with Christianity.

6. For the same causes Christ commands us to pass over injuries, whether they affect our goods, our reputation, or our body, if they are such as may be borne without great detriment, and permits us not on such occasions to avenge ourselves, or to have recourse to the laws and to the civil magistrate for redress. The law of Moses laid no great restraint upon the Jews in this respect; and somewhat more of forbearance is required from us than was from them. *Ye have heard, says our Lord, that it hath been said, An eye for an eye,—but I say unto you, Resist not evil.* The best commentators have shewed that these and the like precepts, if rightly understood, are in themselves very fit and very profitable to society: for whilst we connive at a small offence or injury, we put a stop to much hatred and strife and variance, of which there would be no end, if no man would put up with any affront. Besides, it often comes to pass that he who hath done the wrong is softened and reclaimed by Christian lenity. But in greater injuries, nothing hinders a man from seeking the assistance of the laws and of the magistrate, or if that cannot be done, from acting in his own defence; for indeed without such a permission no civil society could subsist, and all good men would in a manner be bound hand and foot, and delivered up to the vilest of mankind.

There have been some few of exalted minds amongst the gentiles who disapproved and condemned revenge. But our Saviour hath carried the duty farther, and hath told us, that we must love our enemies, and return good for evil, and pray for those who use us despitefully, and imitate our heavenly Father, who is kind even to the unthankful and to the wicked.

Many of the Jews and gentiles accounted revenge to be lawful, and derided Christian patience as a practice absurd and contrary to human nature. Yet what the gospel requires of this kind, if we mistake it not, is very commendable. If we had been commanded to show particular friendship to wicked men who revile and injure us, to account them worthy and

and honest persons, to furnish them with power and opportunity to hurt us, and not to be upon our guard against them, these indeed would have been hard sayings. But it is not so; we are commanded to love them so far as to pity their faults and follies, and to shew them such lenity, forbearance, and kindness, such humanity and civility as can be of no detriment to us, to pray to God for their repentance, and if they prove by their behaviour that they repent and are amended, to receive them into favour.

None can say that these precepts are impracticable. On the contrary, they are so reasonable, that without mutual indulgences of this kind human society can hardly subsist, and frail and fallible creatures cannot live together in tolerable peace and order, unless patience and forgiveness be in some degree approved and exercised.

7. If Christ requires of us thus to bear and to pardon wrongs and offences, and to return good for evil, much more doth he expect that we should love our friends and benefactors, and requite kindnesses with the same, or, if it be possible, with greater favours. If therefore the Apostles had been silent concerning gratitude, yet it had been plain enough that the whole tenour of the New Testament required this virtue. But our Saviour commended the gratitude of the Samaritan leper, who returned to give him thanks for his cure; and St Paul, in his Epistle to the Colossians, having exhorted them to meekness, long-suffering, forbearance, and charity, adds these words, *And be ye thankful*; that is, be grateful both to God and man. And in his Second Epistle to Timothy, describing those wicked men who should arise in the church, he says, that they should be lovers of their own-selves, and unthankful.

8. The duties above mentioned relate to all men in general, and are to be practised by every one through the whole course of his life. There are besides these, duties particular to each person, according to his age, rank, condition, and the relation in which he stands to others. Such are the duties of husbands and wives, of parents and children, of masters and servants, of young and old.

Marriage is reduced by our Saviour to its original institution, as it was in the beginning, before the passions of men had

broken through the rules which right reason prescribed, and by polygamy had brought poverty, jealousy, and discord into houses, and many troubles and mischiefs into the world; to which had been added another evil, that of frequent divorces upon frivolous causes. The gospel requires of those who enter into this state, that they pass their days together in concord and friendship, and in a joint care of their families.

The gospel requires that behaviour from parents to children and from children to parents, which all wise men must approve. It commands parents to educate their children in the fear of God, and to give them all necessary instruction and maintenance, and neither to spoil them by foolish indulgence, nor to use them harshly and imperiously, and provoke them to wrath, by which they will alienate their affection, and may drive them to take bad courses. They are to be guided by admonishment and reason, unless they be of incorrigible dispositions.

It commands children to honour and love and succour their parents, to obey them in all things, and in the Lord; that is, in all things which are agreeable to Christianity, or not contrary to it; for in that case, *He that loveth father or mother more than me, says our Lord, is not worthy of me.*

But this is a plea for disobedience that rarely happens: and there is more danger in Christian nations, that children should pay too little than too much respect to father and mother. One of the great evils which monkery brought into the Christian world, was the inveigling and stealing of young persons, and receiving them into religious orders, without the consent, and against the consent, of their parents. In this the monks acted like true disciples of the pharisees, who compassed sea and land to make proselytes, and who also taught children to disobey their parents: and you will find it to have been and to be the practice of all fanatics of every sort and tribe, to seduce young people from that deference which they ought to pay to those whom God and nature have appointed for their guides and guardians in their tender years.

In the time when the gospel was first preached, servants for the most part were slaves; and as many of these were converted to Christianity, with or without

their masters, it was to be feared lest they should take too much upon them, and think too well of themselves, by entering into a religion which commanded all men to treat one another as brethren. This might have brought a discredit upon the gospel, and have been an hindrance of its progress. Therefore St. Peter and St. Paul earnestly exhort servants or slaves to obey their masters, and to be industrious and honest, and dutifully to serve not only the just and gentle, but the harsh and froward.

The law of nature knows no such thing as slavery; for by nature all men are free and equal: but by the civil laws and by the practice of nations it was established, and it still continues amongst those who know not the gospel, and, the more is the shame and the pity, it is to be found in some places where Christianity is professed. The religion of Christ, when it first made its progress in the world, left the civil laws of nations, in a great measure, as it found them, left by altering or repealing them it should bring confusion and disturbance into human society; but as by its own genius and tendency it leads men gently back to the precepts of nature and equity, to kindness and to mercy, it put an end by degrees, in most civilized places, to that excessive distance and difference between masters and slaves, which owed its original to outrage and war, to violence and calamity: so that in Christian countries the service which is performed is usually, as it ought to be, voluntary and by agreement.

But what the writers of the New Testament have said concerning slaves, holds true concerning hired servants, and all those who are employed in other denominations under a master, that they discharge their office modestly, diligently, and willingly, and act with faithfulness and integrity in every thing that is committed to them.

To all masters the gospel enjoins that they be good and just, forbearing haughtiness, insolence, and threatening, and remembering that they also have a master in heaven.

The same sort of directions may be applied to all who are invested with power in any office or station, and to all who are placed under their government.

Of those who are appointed to teach Christianity,

Christianity, it is required that they study and endeavour to preach it in its own native and amiable simplicity, even as it is contained in the holy scriptures, and that their aim and intention be to do honour to religion, and to make men wiser and better. This also tends to create and preserve a mutual esteem between those who teach, and those who are taught, than which there can be nothing more desirable both to the one and to the other; for the world passeth away with all its concerns, but the good effect of brotherly love and Christian edification is stable and permanent.

Of young people it is required that they be of a teachable and tractable temper, and that they furnish themselves by times with useful knowledge and skill, which will enable them to live contentedly and reputably. It is also required of them, that they pay respect to the aged, and be willing to serve and assist them both on account of the bodily infirmities which attend that part of life, and because it will be their own state if God gives them length of days, and because humanity suggests that we should be courteous to those who probably will not stay long with us, and because the aged have commonly more knowledge and discretion, and can instruct the young in things of importance.

From the aged it is expected, that they be endued with Christian virtues, and set a good example to others, since they have the advantage of long observation to make them sensible of the folly of vice, and the beauty and utility of goodness. Age also tempers and weakens the passions, except in those who are enslaved to wicked habits; age also usually brings prudence and judgment; and these things render the old very capable of assisting and directing the young, especially when they can make proper allowances for the warmth and the defects of youth, and can preserve themselves free from austerity and moroseness. Lastly, it becomes them to meditate on death, as on a change which is near at hand, and to be prepared to go hence with decency and resignation.

Concerning the duty of kings, the Apostles have said nothing, because at that time there were no Christian rulers. The law of nature, and the laws of their own nations, and the law of Moses and the gospel, are sufficient to teach them

their office, and to shew them that the power which their country hath committed to them is a power only to do good, and to restrain evil, and to promote the public welfare.

But concerning the duty of subjects to their princes, the New Testament is not silent. The Apostles recommend, in general expressions, submission and obedience to all who are in authority. St. Paul observes upon this head, that there is no power but from God, and that the powers which be are ordained of God. The meaning is, that civil government is agreeable to the will of God, and ariseth from the nature of things; for God hath so made mankind, that neither can they subsist without society, nor society without government, nor government without rulers. It is therefore the duty of every private person to be a quiet and a peaceable subject, to do nothing which tends to introduce discord and confusion, and the ruin of the state; but to defend his country on all occasions, and with all his power.

Lastly, there is a particular duty incumbent upon every person, and arising from his particular occupation, state, office, or profession, namely, that he acquire the skill and the knowledge which shall make him fit for it, fit to act in it prudently and honestly; else whatsoever virtues and good qualities he may possess, he is inexcusable both with God and man.

Such is our duty to our neighbour, as it may be collected from reason and revelation.

S E R M O N LXI.

The same Subject continued.

TITUS, ii. 11, 12.

The grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, teaching us, that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world.

WE are here exhorted by the Apostle to live soberly, righteously, and godly. Sobriety comprehends our duty to ourselves, righteousness our duty to our neighbour, and godliness our duty to God.

I shall conclude my observations upon the text with examining that part of our duty which, although it hath some reference both to God and to our neighbour, yet relates more immediately to ourselves.

ourselves. This St. Paul calls, living soberly. The word sobriety hath a more extensive signification in the original than in our language, and comprehends in it a right exercise of our reason and of our natural powers, and a discreet government of our passions.

Amongst the helps which God hath bestowed upon us, to lead us to obedience and to happiness, may be reckoned certain useful dispositions and propensities, which are called natural inclinations, which we feel more or less as soon as we come to the use of reason, and which, if we do not corrupt and stifle them, will be confirmed and improved by daily experience, and appear both profitable and commendable. These serve as a counterbalance to those passions which incline us to evil.

First of all then, men are so formed by their Creator that they love truth and hate falsehood. No one chooseth to mistake, to err, and to be deceived; every one is willing and desirous to see things as they really are. We may safely take it for granted, that there are none so brutish, so savage, and so ignorant, as not to approve truth and blame falsehood in general. Consequently they must acknowledge that it is ugly and wicked to deceive, and that it is good and amiable to instruct.

By the same use of reason men see that it is better in general to do good than to do hurt to another, and they generally own it, unless some violent passion prevails with them, and stifles the dictates of nature. When the mind grows calm and capable of exercising its powers, they discover the fitness of such a behaviour, they wish that others would act so towards them, and they endeavour to perform themselves what they thus approve in others.

Hence by steps and degrees we are able to acquire right notions of all sorts of virtues and vices. Every virtuous disposition is advantageous to ourselves and to others, and every vicious habit is hurtful to ourselves and to others. But it must be remembered that the usefulness arising from virtue is not to be considered as confined to a few actions, or to a few men, or to a short space of time: the whole race of mankind, as far as we can be connected with them, and the whole duration of our life, and our future state likewise, are to be taken into consideration. What there-

fore, is useful upon the whole, is agreeable to virtue; and that is to be called vicious which hath a contrary effect; and we say that men would promote the general happiness and their own at the same time, if they would observe the rule of doing good to all; and that the opposite behaviour will be pernicious to them. To observe this rule, is to live according to the dictates of unprejudiced reason, or to live according to nature, and to pursue the end for which they are called into being; and in acting thus there is a decency and a dignity, whence arise self-approbation and satisfaction of mind. Every one, if he will consult his own heart, and speak his thoughts sincerely, must own that virtue is beautiful and honourable, and worthy of love and praise; and that vice is deformed, and shameful, and detestable. Nothing can silence this opinion, which naturally rises in our minds, except some violent passion depriving us of the free use of reason.

Hence we collect and conclude, that almighty God hath implanted in human nature those inclinations which make us love virtue and truth wherever they appear and shew themselves to us, and shun vice, error, and falsehood, when we know them to be what they are. Hence likewise it follows, that the goodness and decency, or the dishonesty and deformity of actions, depend not at all upon the will and the appointment of men, and of human laws, but upon the nature itself and the relation and connection of things, which is fixed and unchangeable: for as truth and falsehood depend not upon us, so neither do virtue and vice. This unalterable nature of good and evil, of right and wrong, and these judgments concerning it, which our own senses and apprehensions lead us to make, are helps which God hath given us against the power and the temptations of sin. When a man doth ill, he inwardly condemns himself; when he doth well, he approves his own behaviour. This St. Paul hath in view, when he says concerning the gentiles, *When the gentiles, who have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these, having not the law, are a law to themselves, which shew the work of the law written in their hearts; their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the mean while accusing or else excusing one another.*

1. The

1. The first duty then which we owe to ourselves, is to cultivate and improve that natural inclination which we have to love truth and virtue: for this is the foundation of all goodness, that we be able to distinguish truth from falsehood, that we esteem it when we have found it, and that we prefer what is right and honest to every thing that is evil and base. Unless we love truth, we shall either never find it, or, if we accidentally meet with it, we shall set no due value upon it. Truth shuns those who despise it, or becomes as useless to them as if it were quite unknown. By the assistance of truth we arrive to a knowledge of virtue, and we are taught to esteem it as we ought; they are united together: without truth there can be no virtue, and without virtue, truth is of small use.

There are an innumerable variety of truths, of which those of the greatest use and importance are, the knowledge of God and of religion, and of ourselves, and of eternal life, and of the way to happiness both here and hereafter. The gospel of Christ is frequently called the truth by the sacred writers; and above all other things it most deserveth that honourable name and character, because it surpasseth all other aids and methods for the discovering of this most valuable knowledge. Christ promised to his Apostles the Spirit of truth, who should lead them into all truth, that is, all necessary truths relating to morality and religion. Christ prays to his Father that he would sanctify them in truth, and says, that his word is truth. When he stood before Pilate, he professed that for this end he came into the world, that he might bear witness to the truth; and every one, says he, *that is of the truth, beareth my voice.* For whosoever sincerely loves the truth, and diligently seeks it, will acknowledge and receive the gospel, when Christ himself and his Apostles teach and confirm it. *We are of God,* says St. John; *he that knoweth God, beareth us; he that is not of God, beareth not us; hereby we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error.* Thus the first duty which we owe to ourselves is to love truth and virtue.

The Hebrew language hath no word which exactly answers to the word virtue; therefore this word is scarcely to be found

in the writers of the New Testament. Instead of it, they say righteousness, holiness, the fear of God, and the like; by which expressions the same thing is meant. However, St. Paul in one place uses the word virtue, and recommends the love of virtue and of truth in very strong terms: *Finally, brethren, says he, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things. Those things which ye have both learned, and received, and heard, and seen in me, do; and the peace of God shall be with you.* From which, and the like exhortations, it is manifest that the love of truth and virtue, which the gospel recommends and requires, is not a bare occupation of the understanding, a barren speculative inquiry concerning the nature of morality, but a practical knowledge of it dwelling in our hearts, by which, when we have found out truth, and know what is virtue, we suit our life and behaviour to our persuasion, openly profess the truth, and recommend it to others, and shew forth virtue in our manners and conversation, whatsoever inconveniencies may press us, and whatsoever dangers may threaten us, for our adherence to them.

2. The gospel commands us to think modestly of ourselves, and to shew forth this modesty in our words and actions, which is called humility by Christian writers, and is founded upon a right knowledge of ourselves. When we are well acquainted with our own defects, and sensible how far short we fall of perfect goodness and knowledge, this usually produces in us dispositions to think and speak lowly of ourselves, and not ambitiously to seek employments for which we are not qualified, recompenses and respects to which we have no claim, and praises and honours which we have done nothing to deserve; this teacheth us to acquiesce in that station wherein the providence of God hath placed us; to be moderate, and peaceable, and honest in our endeavours to advance ourselves to a better condition; and to have the public good and the interests of Christianity more in view than our own private profit. *Else if any one thinketh himself to be somewhat when he is nothing such an one,* says St. Paul, *deceiveth*

ceiveth himself. By this virtue the mind is kept free from pride, insolence, vanity, self-love, and self-conceit.

However, it is to be remembered, that humility may be carried to an excess, and that by debasing ourselves too much, and giving way too tamely to oppression and insolence, or by a sheepish indolence and an over-diffidence of our abilities, we may wrong both ourselves, and our friends, and society, to which we might have been serviceable. If it is our duty to be modest and humble, and quiet and peaceable, it is likewise our duty to be useful to mankind, and to employ whatever powers and talents God hath committed to us for the public good.

By this virtue we are disposed not to despise our inferiors, but to value the good qualities of others, and willingly to commend them; in the exercising of which duty, it is much better to think too favourably than too hardly of any person, and rather to esteem him too much than to detract from him. For although we are by no means to praise others against our own conscience, and for those accomplishments of which they are entirely and manifestly void, yet since they who in some respects are our inferiors, in other respects often equal or surpass us, we have continual occasion to exercise humility and candour, in giving to every one all the regard and all the respect that he can reasonably desire. This behaviour the Apostles require from us: *Submit yourselves one to another in the fear of God. All of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble. Let nothing be done through strife or vain glory, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves. Look not every man on his own things, that is, on his own profit and interest, but every man also on the things of others.*

3. If we would perform our part in life as becomes reasonable creatures and Christians, it is necessary that we possess in some degree the virtue called prudence, by which all other virtues are regulated and conducted, by which we are restrained from acting rashly and hastily, we weigh the circumstances of things, and then we do what certainly or probably tends to the public good. This behaviour concerns our whole life, and all our words and actions, which, unless they be accompanied

with discretion and foresight, may prove pernicious to ourselves and our neighbour, though our intentions were not evil. In the Proverbs of Solomon, and in the book of Ecclesiasticus, there are many useful precepts of this kind, and our Saviour hath exhorted us to join the prudence of the serpent to the simplicity of the dove. Christian prudence is often occupied in forming right judgments of religious truths, duties, actions, and opinions. It preserves us from being imposed upon by deceitful or mistaken men, in things relating to faith or practice; it directs us to adhere to the plain word of God, as it is contained in the Scriptures, in all that we are to believe and to do. By the assistance of this virtue we prove all things, and hold fast that which is good, according to the advice of St. Paul; we believe not every spirit, as St. John admonisheth, but try the spirits whether they are of God, because many false prophets are come into the world. Else we might fall into numberless errors; for every age, and every nation, usually produceth a plentiful harvest of deceivers; and he who is unsteady and unwary will never want a false guide to mislead him.

4. The writers of the New Testament frequently and strictly command us to observe the rules of temperance in our food, and in all lawful pleasures and natural inclinations: by which it is not their design to deprive us of the conveniencies of life, but to make us beware lest by the abuse of things innocent and useful, we should render our souls and bodies unfit to perform their several functions; lest we should waste our fortunes, and impoverish ourselves and our dependents; and lest we should corrupt others by bad example. Therefore the gospel forbids drunkenness, debauchery, extravagance, and intemperance, and all such irregularities, and recommends chastity and sobriety: and these precepts it enjoins altogether for our own sakes, for the good of each individual, and of families, and of human society.

5. Men are so made, and such is their condition, that they who indulge themselves in laziness, will want many things necessary both for soul and body. Whatsoever state of life we be in, we cannot live reputably without labour. Therefore wise men in all times have agreed in condemning idleness, as pernicious to human nature, and a scandalous abuse of those powers

powers and abilities which God hath conferred upon us. And there is the more reason to detest it, because sluggish people are not only destitute of the conveniencies of life and of a mind capable of enjoying them, but are remarkably prone to every thing that is bad, as experience testifies. When poverty and laziness take possession of a man, lying, and cheating, and stealing, are the usual consequences, together with every kind of shameless and sordid meanness, dissimulation, and dishonesty. Besides, the human mind is naturally restless, and occupied continually upon some object and design. It is the unavoidable consequence of being awake. Unless therefore the mind be improved by honest meditations, and employed in useful labours, it gives itself up to expensive amusements, to loose imaginations, to unlawful actions, to keeping bad company and bad hours, or to strolling from one assembly to another, or to drinking or gaming, which are very improperly called diversions and recreations, and only serve to add to the miseries and calamities of life, instead of alleviating or removing them. We have received from God a soul and a body, and we are obliged to take due care of both. The soul is to be exercised in acquiring useful knowledge, without which we shall be blinded by ignorance, and swayed by vice, and fall into many faults which might easily have been avoided. The body is to be occupied in such exercises as may strengthen it, and make it capable of performing what the understanding recommends as proper to be done; and thus we become able to accomplish what our own nature requires, what our friends, and families, and society, may justly hope and expect from us. These are the dictates of reason, and these dictates are enforced and recommended to us by the sacred writers. *This is a faithful saying, says St. Paul to Titus, and these things I will that thou affirm constantly, that they who have believed in God might be careful to maintain good works: these things are good and profitable unto men.* And again: *Let ours also learn to maintain good works for necessary uses, that they be not unfruitful.* To maintain good works, is translated in the margin, to profess honest trades. Let every Christian be of some calling and occupation, that he may live creditably and usefully to himself and others. This pre-

cept belongs, in some sense, to all persons, to kings and nobles as well as to the poorest people, that they may know how to act suitably to their several conditions. Great revenues, and power, and honour are given or trusted to men, for no other purpose than to enable them to govern those who are committed to their hands, and to provide for the public welfare; and to perform the offices of such a station with tolerable credit and dignity, is a charge which requireth industry and application, and many good qualities. As to the bulk of mankind, the case is too clear to want proof. To such belongs the admonition of St. Paul, who having declared concerning himself, that he had often wrought with labour and travail night and day that he might not be chargeable to others, recommends to Christians the same behaviour: *If any will not work, says he, neither should he eat. There are some who walk disorderly amongst you, working not at all, but are busy-bodies. Now them that are such we command and exhort by our Lord Jesus Christ, that with quietness they work, eating their own bread.*

6. There is a virtue extending itself to many parts of our Christian duty, which is called contentedness. It is an even disposition, by which, without repining and complaining, we bear our condition though it be inconvenient; and it is founded on a firm faith and reliance upon the providence of God, and upon his veracity in performing his promises; as likewise upon a knowledge of our many defects, by which we are sensible that if God were to deal with us in strict justice, according to our deserts, our state might be much worse than it is. Whosoever firmly believes that the course of things in general, and every particular event, is guided by the divine providence, with perfect wisdom and goodness, for the good of his creatures, especially of those who serve him, will easily persuade himself that God hath reasons for which he permits some to suffer hardships, and to be exercised with adversity. These reasons he will believe to be sufficient, though perhaps he know them not in their full extent; nor will he suffer any dishonourable thoughts and hard suspicions concerning God's goodness to harbour in his mind, since God hath graciously declared that patience under affliction shall receive

an ample reward in the world to come; and that those things which seem grievous to be borne, and which human nature would willingly shun, often conduce to the health of the soul, and often preserve us from many faults to which a continuance of prosperity exposeth us. The discourses of our Saviour and of his Apostles abound with exhortations to contentment under a low and inconvenient state, and with great encouragement and favourable promises to those who trust in God, and are satisfied with the portion which he allots to them. And indeed this virtue is of singular use to all who would learn to pass quietly and safely through this world to a better. He whose desires are moderate, meets with few temptations and few disappointments; but he whose heart is set upon wealth, though he possess much, is ever desiring something more, and therefore never at heart's ease; and if he meet with losses, becomes most miserable, though he still possesses what a person contented with a little would think more than sufficient, and is ready to take unjustifiable methods with a view to retrieve his fortunes. Of such singular advantage is it to desire no more than uncorrupted nature requires, and so greatly doth it conduce even to our present happiness. Therefore the gospel condemns not only covetousness, which, as St. Paul says, is idolatry, but a greedy desire of external advantages, of high stations, of power and worldly prosperity.

A contempt of riches is so often inculcated in the New Testament, that it seems needless to bring proofs of it. Scarcely is there any thing which is more earnestly coveted than wealth, and yet there is not any thing innocent in itself whence greater evils arise; and this is the reason why Christ requires of us not to set our hearts upon it: he required it out of mere kindness and compassion towards men, who know not what is expedient for them. For whether we have received our riches from our ancestors, or acquired them ourselves, so it happens, that through our own folly they often do us much more harm than good. They are often attended either with covetousness, or with luxury, and a vehement love of pleasure. When they are joined to covetousness, the fear of losses with which such persons are tormented is worse than poverty itself, they labour under apprehensions of evils

which may never come, or which human prudence cannot prevent; they are sordid and uncharitable, and therefore disliked and despised, and they can hardly refrain from any thing mean and vile, when there is a prospect of gain. When riches are joined to luxury, such persons indeed are not slaves to their wealth, but which is rather worse, they are slaves to their passions and appetites, to a thousand follies and vices.

Not that we are to give away all our possessions, and reduce ourselves to a state of poverty, a state which hath its temptations no less than a state of superfluous abundance: only we are to remember that these things are entrusted to us, and that we must make a sober and discreet use of them, that use which God, and nature, and society, require.

7. To contentedness should be added modesty, a virtue by which we are taught never to say or do any thing which becomes not our Christian character, but to avoid all that is rude and indecent. To this virtue relate these exhortations of St. Paul: *Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good, to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace to the hearers. Fornication and all uncleanness—let it not once be named amongst you, as becometh saints; neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor jesting, which are not convenient.*

If these things are not even to be named, much less are they to be practised by Christians: and the Apostle is the more earnest in recommending this modesty in words and actions to the first believers, because the gentiles were notorious offenders in this point.

To this modesty is to be joined moderation in our apparel, and consequently in our furniture, and in all our expences. Of this St. Peter and St. Paul make some mention, and observe at the same time that the endowments of the mind are the best and fairest ornament. No precise bounds can be fixed to duties of this kind, and a reasonable latitude must be left for compliance with custom. The best general rule is to follow the example of those of our own rank and condition who are accounted wise and prudent, and free from vanity and extravagance: and these restrictions cannot be called rigid and severe, since they only forbid a profusion which is attended with numberless evils.

Lastly : In the exercise of all the fore-mentioned virtues is contained and consists the duty which is called self-denial, and which our Saviour requires from his disciples. To deny ourselves is, first, to cast off all vicious inclinations and unlawful desires ; secondly, to reject and avoid every thing that we find by experience to be a temptation and an incitement to sin ; and thirdly, to be willing to part with any object, if ever we should be placed in such circumstances, that either that object or our religion must be quitted.

Such is our duty to ourselves, to which we shall endeavour to conform, if we love ourselves with a rational affection, and set a just value on our better part, on our immortal soul.

S E R M O N LXII.

By ARCHBISHOP WAKE.

The great Benefit of Consideration.

DEUT. xxxii. 29.

O that they were wise, that they understood this, then they would consider their latter end !

THESE words are part of that great song, which Moses spake unto all the congregation of Israel immediately before his death, and which, by God's express command, he left as his last and best legacy to them and their posterity for ever. In the verses before, we have a sad and terrible declaration of those judgments that should hereafter befall them for their impenitence ; which was no doubt the occasion and importance of that passionate wish, into which that prophet here breaks out, in consideration of their danger and insensibility of it : *O that they were wise, that they understood this, that they would consider their latter end !* Whether by their latter end we are to understand that great and terrible destruction which befel themselves and their country in the loss of Jerusalem ; or, whether of God's rejecting them from his covenant, and from being any longer his own peculiar inheritance ; whether one or both, yet it is certain, that a greater and more amazing instance of the divine vengeance on a particular nation has hardly been known from the beginning of the world : and the cause of all their evils was inconsideration, a fault much more

inexcusable in the Israelites, as they had received most clear and sensible proofs of the divine power and goodness. For they had seen the miracles by which God had brought them out of the land of Egypt, and conducted them near forty years through the wilderness. They had beheld his majesty when in a very terrible manner he vouchsafed to give them his law from mount Sinai. Nay, that nothing might be wanting to awaken a stupid and insensible people, they had known his judgments too, in the punishment of their sins. They had seen the destruction which their fathers had suffered, and were expressly foretold, what evils they and their posterity should undergo for their impiety. And yet all this was not sufficient to awaken their consideration, to raise in them a sense of, and care to prevent the danger that attended them. And would to God these Jews were the only persons to be charged with this neglect ; and that our indifferency in doing our duty did not equally proceed from the same inconsideration. Alas ! were we to enter on a review, we should find but too just a parallel, both in danger and incogitancy. And the words of Moses may aptly be applied to us Christians, *O that we were wise, that we understood this, that we would consider our latter end !* In speaking on a subject so necessary and important, I shall shew the danger and mischief of inconsideration ; inquire into the causes thereof, offer some general rules for the practice of it ; and lastly draw some practical inferences from the whole.

It has been the usual method of most casuists in inquiring into the causes of sin, to expose the mischiefs, and aggravate the danger, of those particular temptations, that are the immediate occasions thereof. Hence many run into invectives against the interests and pleasures, the honours and riches of the world ; assuring the good Christian, that he must resolve to abandon them, or at least quit all undue esteem and inordinate desire of them. But the true and universal cause of all our evils, is inconsideration ; this is neglected, or but lightly and seldom touched on. There are, I believe, but very few who place it in the number of their temptations, or think themselves concerned to provide against it. But before I proceed to those particulars which concern the removal of this evil, I shall endeavour to convince

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men of the necessity of consideration; by shewing, that of all the devil's artifices, this has been the most successful, and that all other temptations are derived from the influence of this. That riches and honour, pleasure and interest, do only seduce some; triumph over the weakness only of some dispositions; but that inconsideration is a general snare, which carries all before it; the one universal cause of all our sins, being no other than this, that we do not consider, as we ought, what our duty is, and what our obligations are to practise it. And

It cannot be denied, but that inconsideration exposes us to every temptation, which the devil shall think fit to lay in our way; it is often the cause that we are tempted, and always the reason of our being overcome by the temptation. How many sins do men fall into, for want of considering and knowing they were sins? There is scarce a more general plea in the mouth of every sinner, than that he meant no harm in what he did, that he did not know or think it was unlawful. And this want of consideration exposes men to infinite temptations, by keeping them in a criminal ignorance of what they should have known and considered. Nor are the ignorant only concerned in this danger. He who knows his duty the best, is yet oftentimes no less surprised by his incogitancy than the most ignorant. The devil, who knows our weakest times, and constantly watches his advantage, then assaults us most, when he sees us least on our guard, and in no condition to resist him. And if by a diligent care and attention to our duty, we are not as readily prepared to resist those temptations he solicits us to, as we are otherwise well instructed in our duty; our enemy will have a great advantage against us, if not sufficient power to overcome us. And that inconsideration is the real ultimate cause of all our sins, will appear, if it be observed,

That there are in our religion such motives and engagements to obedience, that were they duly weighed, it would be impossible for a man to live wickedly. Is there any among us who hath but once seriously reflected on the nature of God; how excellent his goodness is, how terrible his justice; with what an irreconcilable hatred he prosecutes sin and sinners for its sake; that he is omnipotent, and cannot

be resisted; omniscient and cannot be deceived; that he is every where present, sees our most retired actions, and will one day bring them all to light; in the day *when he shall judge the world in righteousness?* Let him, who has seriously considered this, say, whether the devil could draw him into sin, while he had such thoughts to oppose his temptations. But Christianity carries us yet further. It shews us a God incarnate, a God made man on purpose for our salvation; *who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity.* It represents to us a covenant of grace, sealed with his own most precious blood, in which we have been solemnly initiated and sworn at our baptism; the condition whereof was, "that we should forsake the devil and all his works, the pomps and vanities of this wicked world, and all the sinful lusts of the flesh;" and instead of serving these, should obediently "keep God's holy will and commandments, and walk in the same all the days of our life." And whoever duly considers the weight and moment of this one engagement, will find it an impregnable fortress against sin, such as all the temptations in the world can never overcome. For to reflect but briefly thereon: What is there in all our sins, or the temptations that lead to them, whose force and power would not be frustrated by this one serious consideration? Where is the lust that can offer any tolerable inducement to comply with it, when compared with our obligations to love and obey so great, so excellent a Redeemer? Is there a passion so darling, an interest so valuable, that the most desperate sinner in his cool considerate thoughts, would be willing to exchange for heaven? or rather, which is the case, be content for the prosecution of it, to go down, perhaps the next moment, into hell, and there dwell with everlasting burnings? So that however sin may deceive us by our carelessness, yet it can never stand before consideration. It may surprise our passions, but cannot possibly reconcile itself to our reason. Nor are our natures yet so degenerate, but that a due reflection on our engagements to obedience, would, by God's grace, soon oblige us to a performance of it. And the hopes of heaven, the terrors of hell, the vanity of this world, and the eternity of the next, were they once considered as they ought to be, would so effectually stop our

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our ears against the arts of the *charmer*, *charm be never so wisely*, as not to be able to open them to his insinuation. Again,

That the want of consideration is really the great and true cause of all our sins; let me appeal to the common practice and experience of all mankind, whether any who begins seriously to consider these things, does not presently become a good Christian. Or else, what is it that makes the worst of sinners, if they come into any danger or calamity, sickness or affliction, or that any thing stops them in their wild career, so as to give them time to cool and consider their duty, and their great and dangerous deviations from it: what is it but consideration, that makes such persons presently disclaim their extravagancies, to confess that they were mistaken in their notions of virtue and vice, and had therefore preferred the interests of the one, because they had not known or sufficiently considered the excellency of the other? And though these pious reflections may not secure their future obedience, but such persons may again return to their renounced follies, yet that is not because piety and religion have not sufficient reason on their side, and which ought to engage them to deny themselves, and forsake their sensual pleasures, and worldly interests; but only that their danger being removed, they have with it also lost their consideration; and their incogitancy again exposes them to those sins, which, when they reflect on, they will be equally ready to condemn in themselves as before. Thus sufficiently evident is the great mischief of inconsideration. But I will add one reflection more, which is,

That whatever particular temptations we may by chance be exposed to, would be of no force, was it not for inconsideration. Pleasure, riches, honour, and interest, or any more powerful vanity, are not such omnipotent temptations as our corrupt affections would represent them; on the contrary, it is certain they would have no force, but by our own incogitancy. As for pleasure; would the voluptuary pursue that as he does, did he really reflect, what, in a little time, will be the end of his debaucheries: that in a few years, perhaps it may be only months or days, all his enjoyments shall cease; his pleasures be exchanged for pain and sickness, impotence and infirmity; those torments in

this life, which are usually the sad fore-runners of his eternal punishment in the other? And as for riches; would any take so much care and labour to get them, who knows how perishing they are in their own nature, and also considers that treasure in heaven, which the gospel speaks of as so infinitely surpassing all the highest acquisitions here; and so much surer to be obtained, so easily acquired, so durable and eternal? As to honour, if there can be such a thing without virtue; if high places and great titles, that have so long usurped the name, may be allowed the character of it; what judgment can any considering man pass upon such honour; but that Christianity apart, it must certainly be a vain thing to build a man's hopes, and expend his life, on what depends on men's opinion of, and value for us; who often give this thing called honour to the most undeserving, in exclusion of the truly brave and worthy? And then for the interests of this world; alas! what can they appear to any serious considering man, but mere vanity, who does but remember the great and wise question of his Saviour: *What is a man profited, if he should gain the whole world and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?* Hence it is evident, that our greatest danger under any temptation, arises from the want of consideration.

And if we inquire into the causes of this inconsideration, it will appear, that the first and most fatal of all is, that men imagine they do well consider these things, when in truth they do not. If we are sometimes a little serious and reflect on religion; if we go to church on Sundays, and are not scandalously wicked the week after; if we receive the holy sacrament in its seasons, and reflect a little the week before on our sins and vanities, and resolve to sin no more; this by many is called considering, and I fear is the only religion of a great number of people. But, alas! this is far from being true consideration. It is not every slight reflection on religion, which deserves that name. He that will do it effectually, must resolve to search the bottom of his soul; not a sin so secret, a lust or interest so dear or profitable to us, but to the best of our power must be discovered and rooted out. The danger of sin in general, all the black circumstances and aggravations of our particular sins, must seriously be considered;

dered; the hopes and terrors of eternity thoroughly weighed; what the goodness of God is, if we repent; what his judgment will be, if we continue to despise the riches of his mercy, and treasure up to ourselves wrath against the day of wrath. In short, whatever can tend to convince us of our sins and certain danger, engage us to forsake the one and escape the other, must be laid before us so long, till that by God's grace we be brought to such a sense of our condition, as sincerely to repent of our past sins, and stedfastly resolve to obey God's commands. Without thus considering, no one considers as he ought; he only flatters himself, and cheats his own soul.

Another cause of men's inconsideration, in matters of religion, is the applying their minds and thoughts to other purposes. The generality of mankind regard religion as a thing indifferent, and not as their proper business, somewhat to entertain them when melancholy, or at some solemn times, but not to be made the subject of their more immediate thoughts and consideration. Thus do such reverse the maxim of our Saviour, and make not our salvation, but the business of this world, our employments and interest, and too many even sin and vice, the one thing needful. And if then this is the case, no wonder if we see such sad and dreadful effects; for if men esteem the concerns of this present life their main business, we need not be surprised they consider no more of a far better country. We may indeed with Moses wish, *O that they were wise, that they would consider this!* But till this mistake is rectified, we cannot much expect they should consider their latter end: and though there is nothing more pleasing or agreeable to our rational nature, than the practice of religion; yet there being something rough and uneasy in the first setting out, which the habitual sinner cannot without pains and difficulty get over, this is another, and no small disadvantage to religion. He who prospers by sin, who grows rich, great, or honourable by injury or oppression, by fraud and flattery, will no doubt be very uneasy to embrace a religion that requires justice and integrity, in every action; that forbids violence and rapine, all wicked artifice and dissimulation, and all those evil methods by which he has increased and flourished. So that what with a prevailing

interest, or real fear; an unwillingness to forsake sin, or thinking it impossible to be overcome; many, I believe, go on without considering, and hate to reflect on what they resolve never to reform. Or, lastly,

Men are apt to delay this great affair, resolving one time or other to consider, without having the heart to set about it. This is also a great, and, I fear, general fault, such as perhaps has ruined more souls than any one thing in the world. Thus some refer these kind of thoughts to old age, and yet never come to it, but go down in the grave without having provided for it. Others fix a time, which business afterwards disappoints. At length, God's grace is withdrawn, and conscience having been often denied, grows weary of any longer importunity; and when we thought to have considered, we find neither will, strength, nor opportunity for it.

But it may be of use to give some general rules for the practice of consideration. And this must be done by a serious and impartial inquiry, both into ourselves, and our religion: by a diligent and strict examination what our duty towards God is, and how we ought to perform it. As to our duty towards God, the necessity of this is so well understood, that however negligent all are, every one is convinced of his obligations to it. Indeed it is the fault of many to fix their thoughts on some part of their religion to the neglect of the rest; to run away with the promises of the gospel, without considering what they must do to entitle themselves thereto. Others solely regard the difficulty of its commands, and concluding it impossible to live as they ought, think it in vain to try what they can do. Some admiring St. Paul's account of faith, without considering what it is, content themselves with having a right faith, not regarding the necessity of good works, recommended by St. James. Others think themselves secure, in being members of a pure reformed church, on the one hand; or else of an unerring infallible catholic church on the other; as if the espousing such an interest, church, or party, was all God requires in order to salvation. Many are the mistakes of this kind; to prevent which, let me give this plain rule for the direction of all: that whosoever will consider, as he ought, must

must do it universally, and leave no part of his religion unexamined. That whatever consideration contributes to lessen our duty, or rather does not promote it, is false and imperfect; and if he stops there, it will deceive and ruin him. We are also to consider our state and our duty, what God requires of us, and how we have lived, and not to defer this. For since our life is but a puff of breath, every day in our nostrils, and not one moment that we can call our own, it will concern us much, not to defer considering how we are provided for another world.

Repentance is a duty that cannot be discharged in a moment, nor is there any time or place for it, after this life; and should we through inconsideration neglect it, we shall in vain lament our sin and folly to all eternity. Whoever has omitted so great and necessary a duty, let not such longer defer it, nor suffer *his eyes to sleep, nor his eye-lids to slumber*, until he sets about it. Indeed it is to be wished, that men would not let one day slip without this consideration; because a day seldom passes but that we are guilty of something that calls for repentance; and no one knows, when he lies down to sleep, whether he shall ever rise again to perform it.

To conclude: I have already observed, that want of consideration is the great universal cause of all our sins; and till that is removed, it will be impossible for us to repent of them. And, one would think, nothing more need be said to engage any sober man to the practice of it:—but I must go farther yet. Almighty God, who has given us our understandings and wills, on purpose for his service, requires the concurrence of them in all our actions; his service must be reasonable, or it will not be accepted. He is not pleased with what we do by chance; where his glory is not designed, he thinks it not advanced; and that good which is done without considering, is but a mere natural action, and deserves as little praise, as a plant for growing, or a stone for falling down to its centre. It is in vain therefore to pretend to be Christians, and to desire salvation, without reflecting, what it is to be the one, and how we should live to attain the other. This is certainly such a combination of folly and impiety, that was not sin as great an enemy to reason, as re-

ligion, no man could possibly be guilty of it. For, after all the frightful ideas men are apt to entertain of consideration, it is not only one of the most useful, but the most pleasing things in the world.

Let me appeal to the experience of those pious souls, who, by a due performance of this exercise, have their conversation already in heaven: who are elevated above the little passions and interests that engage the busy part of mankind in so much labour and vanity: who live in this world, as if they were not of it; free and quiet in the midst of its disturbances; still the same in every state: who love nothing but God and their duty; fear nothing but to sin against him; nor desire any thing but to be dissolved, and to be with him: whose well-grounded hopes secure them of their future reward, and a good conscience fully assures them, that neither death nor hell itself, nor any evils of this life, nor any terrors of the other, are able to disturb the inward peace and satisfaction of their minds.

O happy state! the blessed effects of a serious and frequent consideration! Can any sinner pretend to have found in the ways of wickedness a pleasure like what a good Christian meets with, even in the present course of his life? Let the miser boast of his riches, the ambitious man of his honours; let the voluptuary wallow in all sensual and unmanly satisfactions; but what vanities are all these, when compared with the solid comfort and satisfaction of a good conscience? a conscience that can reflect freely on its actions; can search into the most secret parts of its life, with joy and assurance; and delights to compare its duty and practice, to see how the one illustrates and sets off the other. Who would not pursue the happiness of such a state, though there were no such thing as heaven and eternity to follow after? Certainly, if pleasure be that which is to govern our pursuits, it is the good Christian that is the only wise man; and to consider, the most delightful practice. Only let us seriously consider, and as we ought; let us once in our lives be persuaded heartily to experiment a duty, which is the great business of our whole life; let us be willing to be convinced, and to do our religion and souls so much justice, as to give these things a fair and equal hearing; so shall all those blessings I have been speaking of,

descend upon us. We shall only exchange, not lose or lessen, our enjoyments. Whatever pleasure or satisfaction we have heretofore met with in the ways of sin, we shall find them all infinitely exceeded in the practice of religion; and when we become fit for heaven, and ripe for immortality, we shall be translated from these excellent, but imperfect joys, to those absolute and eternal blessings, which *neither eye hath seen, nor ear heard, nor does it enter into the heart of man to conceive.*

SERMON LXIII.

By BISHOP HICKMAN.

The great Duty of Self-knowledge:

PSALM ix. 10.

Put them in fear, O Lord, that the heathen may know themselves to be but men.

WHEN God created the heaven and the earth, and distinguished the whole creation, in their several orders and degrees, he placed man in the middle region, between himself and the inferior world, that we might obey the one and command the other. And in order to the preserving our respect towards God, and our government towards the creatures, he gave us laws to instruct and direct our conduct in that course of life, on which all our wisdom and happiness depends. But through our perverseness or simplicity, many temptations are apt to divert us from the right way; for either a vain desire of greatness, or an excessive love of riches and pleasures, make us forget our duty to God; and instead of walking in the ways of wisdom, our eyes are so blinded with ambition, covetousness, and luxury, that we degenerate into something less than man.

To prevent this fatal miscarriage, God has enforced his laws, by many gracious promises, to invite us to our duty, and many dreadful threatenings, to deter us from evil. When the one proves ineffectual, he will execute the other. If we are so hardened and stupid, that nothing but judgments can awaken us, God will send his terrors among us, to make us know him; and his judgments, to know ourselves. As therefore the knowledge

of ourselves is a religious duty, I shall endeavour to shew the excellency and usefulness of this knowledge.

There are indeed some who think for man to know himself, is of all knowledge the most delightful and easy. But this proceeds from our ignorance: for, alas! though we can with ease gaze round us, be very intent upon remote concerns, yet all the while we may be utterly unacquainted with ourselves. Besides, it is an unpleasant thing for a man to look into himself, to rake into the filthiness of his own heart, and discompose the quiet of his mind; hence it is that so many men take up with a superficial and false account of their own affairs, and are often most pleased with themselves, when they have the least reason for it. And however we may think that this fond conceit of our own worth is only an innocent allowable mistake; yet, upon examination, we shall find it such a dangerous error and disposition of mind as will disable us from performing our several duties; for it is giving up our reason, to be guided by fantasy and humour.

He that will not take the pains to know himself, lives as it were by chance, and moves without design. He embraces vice or virtue as they best suit his fancy or convenience; but seldom considers the excellence of his nature, or the good pleasure of his God. Thus when a conceited man has lost himself it is impossible he should maintain his proper station in life, or observe decency and justice towards men, but he will be apt to encroach upon their rights and liberties; and we must ascribe all that insolence, imposition, and violence in the world, to this ignorant self-love. We may as well expect meekness from a lion, as common justice from one conceited of his own worth, and full of himself. He that thinks himself something more than man, will not look upon others as his fellow-creatures, but takes a pleasure and pride in despising and treating them like despicable worms.

From whence proceed, in general, all heresies and schisms in the church, all tumults and factions in the state; but from this ignorance and carnal pride, this exalting ourselves above measure, and undervaluing every ordinance of God and man? But had we the sense to consider, or the grace to understand, what we are; we shall appear to be only a load of infirmities,

mities, a lump of flesh wherein our spirits are imprisoned and confined. For God knows what worthless senseless creatures we are; having nothing to boast of, but what we received from him; nothing but our humility to recommend us to God or man. For what is our wisdom, goodness, and greatness, to value ourselves upon? Whosoever does so, knows not what it is to be wise, great, or good. In short, it is nothing but ignorance that makes us so fond of admiring ourselves, which occasions all the decays of virtue, religion, and government in the world; and proves how necessary a duty, and great virtue it is, for men to know themselves. In order to our obtaining this knowledge, we ought to consider both our nature and end.

We must consider our own nature, the value and station we bear in the world; that so our behaviour may be decent and agreeable thereto. Hence some compare this world to a stage, where every person is to act conformably to his place and character. A prince should not degrade himself to those mean performances which are fit and proper in a peasant; nor a subject usurp the style or affect the figure of a prince. But much more absurd it is, for ignorant man, born in weakness and sin, the son of corruption, and brother to the worms, to aspire unto the throne of God, assume to himself absolute power, and to think he is more than man; and no less shameful is it, that man, who is born lord of this world, heir of eternity, companion of angels, and representative of God on earth, should submit to sordid mean desires, make himself less than man, even level to the beasts that perish. It behoves us therefore to consider our nature and constitution, that we may seek after those things that are agreeable to them. If our souls are our better part, and immortal, it requires our greatest care, as being an eternal good.

We ought also to study our own inclinations, that we may know how to apply the advantage of religion, to the exigencies of our souls. For there is no man so perfectly virtuous, but he has a tendency to some vice; nor is there scarce any so profligate in vice, who has not some remains of virtue. If therefore we know ourselves, and our inclinations to good and evil, we may by degrees gain ground upon our vices. Some sparks of virtue that

lie covered, may with a little care be blown up into a glorious flame: and we ought to cherish these remains of goodness, and propagate the seeds of virtue. If we are hardened by sin, we may find some tender part capable of good impressions, and by degrees reduce the whole. Let us but learn to know ourselves, see how we stand affected towards the vanities and vices of the world, and we shall soon discover our failings, which is the first and great step towards a remedy; for then we are only to use our diligence and care, to subdue those vices which are most predominant, and to set a double guard on our weakest side. But if we give the devil an opportunity to assault us, when unprepared, he wants neither subtlety nor malice to take advantage, and pursue it to our ruin. Our principal care and design should therefore be to conquer our favourite sins and darlings' lusts, and then we shall find no difficulty in all the rest.

And yet how common is it, for men to neglect this, and bend their forces another way; to fortify themselves against remoter dangers, those lusts they have no inclination to; but as for their beloved sin, that has taken shelter in their bosoms, to cherish and keep it up, in defiance of correction or reproof. Hence it is, that many men in appearance live very regular and zealous lives, and comply with all the outward exercises of religion, and yet there is no alteration in their lives, where it is most wanted. This is what turns godliness into formality, and frustrates the design of religion. This want of knowing ourselves, is the only cause why so many people make outward profession of the gospel, and yet are inwardly never the better. But,

In order to know ourselves, we must consider the end we aim at; and usually there are two sorts of ends to direct our actions, an ultimate, and an intermediate end. For every considerate man proposes to himself some principal ultimate end; some universal main design, which he pursues in all his thoughts and actions, and makes the centre of his happiness. Thus one man proposes honour for his portion, another chuses riches, a third pleasure; and but very few are there who delight in virtue and religion; for when men once fix their choice on the meaner concerns of this world, they scarce think

upon any thing else. Indeed, he that proposes to lead a virtuous religious life, may desire a competency of the riches, honours, and pleasures of the world; but then he quits them all when they are inconsistent with his religion. And this last end is most desirable, because we undertake the rest for the sake of that.

And now let every man seriously ask himself this important question: What end he proposes to himself, or what his business is in the world? The ambitious man will answer, to be great and honourable. But surely to come into the world like a comet, to be admired by the vulgar, and despised by the wise, is below the dignity of a reasonable creature. Perhaps another will say, that his business here is only to take pleasure; but does not his being here depend on God's pleasure, and his well-being on the protection of the laws, and the good of the commonwealth? and if so, ought he not in gratitude, in prudence, and in conscience, to conform to the pleasure of God, and to be useful to the state, and not to make his pleasure his law, and his belly his God? Another will perhaps say, that his designs are only to grow rich; but this is a manifest absurdity and contradiction. For if he would grow rich to promote the honour or pleasure of himself, or his posterity, then honour or pleasure is his principal end, and riches are only means thereto: but if he would grow rich for the sake of riches, he is then the most indigent and despicable man alive; being poorer to all the ends of riches than he that has got nothing. Thus we see, that neither riches, pleasures, nor honours, those idols of the world, can be the principal end which a wise man proposes to himself; for a man in the highest honours may be discontented, and not without reason; a man of pleasure may be condemned, and not to be wondered at; and a man of great riches may be miserable, even to a proverb.

Since then none of these things can be the ultimate design, the proper objects of our wishes; what is it we should desire but to be happy? and as these vanities cannot be our real happiness, we must study to be wise, that we may enjoy happiness. We must leave these amusements to the world, to the heathen who do not know themselves, no more than they do that God that made them. We must

find out some other end more suitable to our nature, more worthy of our pains; which can only be the service of our God, and the salvation of our souls. Here we must fix our hopes, and make all our actions tend; there being no other way to reconcile our worldly cares to reason or common sense, but by making them subservient to religion. Then we may desire riches for the greater opportunity of doing good upon earth, in hopes of obtaining a greater reward in heaven. Then we may use innocent pleasures for the preservation and refreshment of life; in order to obtain a better inheritance hereafter. Then we may fairly desire honour and reputation in the world, that by an illustrious example of virtue to others, it may be the means of saving our own souls. It is this last end, that encourages and justifies all the rest. Take away the eternal weight of glory, and how frivolous, how insignificant are all these momentary pleasures? or what will it profit us *to gain the whole world, and lose our own souls.*

Having thus discovered what our proper end is, let us next inquire what progress and advances we have made towards the salvation of our souls; for with all the wisdom of men, too few are wise enough to do their duty. They see the glorious prize before them, yet will not run so as to obtain, but slothfully acquiesce in the formalities of religion, and in an unactive faith, as if that was enough to carry us to heaven. It is strange indeed, that we should know religion, and the value of our precious souls so well, and yet live as we do. Our Saviour speaks of taking heaven by violence, to shew what labours and difficulties a good Christian should undergo, to procure the salvation of his soul; but we, by our unconcerned behaviour in this point, seem to expect that heaven should commit a violence upon us. The Apostles and primitive martyrs endured the severest persecutions, imprisonments, and deaths, as examples for our imitation; and yet we can hear all this without the least remorse. The angels rejoice in heaven over every sinner that repenteth; and yet we have no joy but in our sins. Our blessed Saviour relinquished the bosom of his Father, and submitted to a most indigent life, and shameful death; and yet we, who were the cause of this, are neither ashamed nor troubled

troubled about it. Surely, he did not make himself so poor, only to make us rich; nor bestow temporal honours upon us, only to gratify our ambition: these are below the dignity of the gospel; prizes too mean for the Son of God to purchase, or the sons of men to desire. Much less did he take up his cross, that we might indulge ourselves in sensual delights. This is a contradiction to all religion. But he did it that we might learn to follow the captain of our salvation, by a laborious virtue, in order by our victory to obtain a crown of glory.

Since then ambition, covetousness, and lust, are those corrupted principles from whence all vicious practices grow and increase upon us, and this chiefly for the want of knowing ourselves; I will now more particularly consider, how it is that these bad principles hinder this knowledge in us.

The first vice which dazzles our eyes and hinders us from knowing ourselves, is ambition: a vice to which mankind has too natural an inclination; and with this bait the devil tempted the first man. When our desires take their rise from proper grounds, and are directed to proper ends, there is a virtue in ambition. We may study to be alike God in wisdom, if we can; and in goodness if we please. But when we aim to be like him in power, and to be above restraint, then there is vanity in the inclination, and danger in the attempt, which makes ambition a vice. Thus the angels fell; who, by endeavouring to exalt themselves, were miserably degraded, and degenerated into accursed spirits. And yet neither the angels, nor our fore-fathers fall, can terrify us from the like presumption; but we will be still bordering upon their guilt, and flattering ourselves, that we are something more than men. We first learn to despise our fellow-creatures, and from thence ambition soars aloft, and teaches us to defy our God; to value ourselves upon rejecting his commands, and to think we are very great, for daring to be very wicked. This sin of ambition is the first inlet to vice. For the sake of this idol, this mere phantom, men are contented to sacrifice their own peace, and the quietness of the world, to build trophies on the ruins of other men, only to stand a little higher in the eye and admiration of the people.

When ambition leads a man on, every

virtue must submit to him; both justice and mercy must give way to his violence. If he can but get the superiority, and appear like God, he cares not what destruction he brings on man, or how he disturbs the course of nature. From hence tumults and factions, slaughters and desolations take their rise: for when a pampered ambition prevails, hatred and malice, rancour and revenge, like a destroying army, attend its motions, and execute its designs. And can any man pretend to know himself, who ventures on such an enterprize? For, alas! how easily are we crushed in the height of all our pride? God need not with his thunder to cast us down; since one blast of his air, one breath of his displeasure will undo us. If he only withholds our breath we die, and all our enterprizes fall to the ground. Is this our glory, this our pride! how contemptible is designing man, who mistakes his honour, and does not know himself? does not know that there is neither device nor wisdom in the grave, whither he is going. Let us not then rejoice in flattering ourselves that we are like gods upon earth; but that our names are written in the book of heaven. Let us not boast that we have made many men subject to our power; but that we have overcome the perverseness of our wills, subdued our unruly passions, and are grown so wise, as to know, and so great as to command ourselves.

The second corrupted principle, which debauches our nature, and hinders us from knowing ourselves, is covetousness, or an immoderate love of wealth. In ambition there is something of generosity, but covetousness is perfectly vile and sordid. Ambition is an overflowing of the spirit, but covetousness sinks us below the flesh. It is burying ourselves alive, and anticipating the curse which God denounced upon us, *dust thou art, and to dust thou shalt return*. It is making us less than the worms, the lowest of all the creatures; they only grovel in the dust to satisfy their nature, and provide themselves with food; but covetous man rakes without measure, and scrapes without design, and never thinks he has got dust enough, till he returns to it himself; his appetite is never satisfied till his mouth is stopt. It is this that occasions all that fraud, extortion, op-

pression, and falsehood, that is practised among us. *Covetousness is the root of all evil.*

How wonderful is it then, that man should not know what it is to be a man, nor how to answer the ends of his nature; which most certainly are to improve in wisdom, and to grow in grace, till our spirits are so refined as to be fit to appear before God. But can this end be promoted by our growing rich? all our labour of this kind tends the direct contrary way; it is stifling our spirits under ground in the mines, when our thoughts should be soaring up on high. *Therefore, says the wise man, get wisdom, and with all thy getting, get understanding; for wisdom is much better than gold, and understanding rather to be chosen than silver.* So many absurdities and contradictions are involved in this one single vice, that, did we not see it practised, we should scarce believe that a man should labour for he knows not what, and save it for he knows not whom. If we view his income, he would seem the most selfish man in nature; but if we consider his expence, he is certainly the most self-denying man alive.

But there is another powerful principle of vice within us, which hinders us from knowing ourselves, and from pursuing our proper end; and that is lust, or an immoderate desire of pleasure. There is nothing so easily imposed upon as a man of pleasure; for he judges of things only by his sense, which is the most deceitful judge in nature. How shameful is it for a man to set aside his reason and virtue, his understanding and religion, and devote himself to a slothful sensual life? To be so unacquainted with himself, and forgetful of his soul, as to employ all his time to entertain his body? But we are too apt to get into a habit of sensuality before we are aware, and to like it we know not why.

However, I would not be thought to undertake so needless and unnecessary a work, as to persuade men from pleasure in general, since God not only allows, but allots it for our use; nor would I absolutely condemn even the pleasures of sense, or set nature and religion at variance. My only intention is, to shew, that what we call pleasure, is not really so, but only a childish fluttering state of life, too light and airy to build any solid satis-

faction upon. We think it agreeable to our nature, but this is a mistake; for it first debauches that before we can approve it: and then what we call our nature, is nothing but our corruption; so that we are first corrupted, and then destroyed. And therefore since our pleasures are not to be extinguished in us, it is absolutely necessary that they should be regulated and reformed; so that our pleasure may be agreeable not only to our sense, but to the principles of our reason and religion, and consistent with our happiness.

Thus we have considered the three vicious corrupted principles within us, which make us forsake the law of our nature, and the commandments of God, and keep us from knowing ourselves; namely, ambition, covetousness, and lust. With one or other of these vices every man in some measure is possessed; and it is our duty to find out which of them it is, that, by knowing our darling sin, where our death and danger lies, we may correct and put a stop to the growing evil, before it becomes desperate. And we cannot but observe of all those vices, that though they may divert us for a time, and give some present deceitful satisfaction, yet they can never settle us in a state of ease and happiness. An ambitious man is above, and a luxurious man beside himself. He who is truly virtuous and contented, is the only man that, under all the turns of fortune in this world, maintains his station, and stands his ground. He neither flies too high, through a vain ambition, nor descends too low, through covetousness or sensual lusts; but with an equal temper of mind, and a perfect indifferency to all things human, he enjoys the smiles and despises the frowns of fortune; he is undisturbed at the course of this world, is unmoved at the chances and motions of this transitory life, because he has a dearer concern, a better portion in the world to come.

Was such a man, so established in virtue and settled in his principles, but seriously to reflect on the common practices and folly of the world; would his better thoughts, his diviner contemplations, give him leave to see with what eagerness, hurry, and zeal, the men of this world strive to ruin themselves and others; how they will alike trample upon the necks of friend and foe, to promote some little paltry vile designs;

signs; how would he stand amazed at this world, and conclude that hell itself could not be a more wicked place? When he sees with what fury, malice, and revenge, they persecute those who dare oppose the interests of their ambition, covetousness, or lust; how earnestly would he pray, that God would deliver him from such a savage race? How zealously would he wish to enjoy some private retirement where he may enjoy calmer days, and, in perfect serenity of mind, taste the sweets and relish the joys of a quiet conscience and a favourable God? In this happy state, he will find riches, honours, and pleasures in abundance; such pleasures as the sensual man never heard of; such riches as the covetous man never saw; such honours as the ambitious man can never possess: perfect peace and tranquillity of mind, undoubted security and establishment of heart, are the certain portion of that man who knows himself, and fears his God.

But if our ambition, covetousness, or lusts have so far got the ascendancy of us, as that religion can make no impression upon us; then God will find such other ways to work upon us, as we shall soon repent of. If our hearts are never so hardened, yet there are two arrows of God that will be sure to reach us; calamity and death. Calamity is one effectual method which God uses to make us know ourselves. When he strips us of all our gaudy plumes, and sends us despicable and almost naked into that world where we before took so much pride, then we shall not only know, but despise and condemn ourselves for our past folly. When poverty and shame come upon us, and deprive us of that armour which our ambition and covetousness hath clothed us with; then we shall wish for the breast-plate of righteousness, and the sword of the spirit; and confess that one grain of faith is better than many talents of gold and silver; than all that pomp which our ambition can desire; than all that treasure which our covetousness could rake up, or our luxury squander away. When our haughty looks shall be brought down, our deceitful honours taken from us, we shall no more trust to the smiles of fortune, nor believe the flatteries of men; but learn impartially to examine the condition of our souls, and see how unhappy that man must be who does not chuse virtue for his ornament,

and God for his defence. Prosperity is deceitful; but adversity gives us a full view, and free access to our own bosoms, and shews what is there amiss; it corrects the swellings of our hearts, assuages the overflowing of our pride, and plainly proves, that there is no true genuine pleasure but in being virtuous; no solid greatness, but in being humble; that the way to be happy men is to *know ourselves to be but men*.

The last method of Providence to reclaim us, and make us know ourselves, is death. When this sad spectacle holds the glass, and shews our ghastly face, then to our sorrow we shall see of what we are made, and to what we must return. When this body of ours, upon which we have bestowed so much pains, at the expence of our precious souls, is now sinking into nothing, how will all our pride and pleasure die before us? We shall then be convinced that we must die like men, and soon become dust and ashes. To what purpose then should we contrive mighty projects, and lay vast designs, when death may overtake us in the height of our vanity, and stifle our ambition in the birth. Alas! what a tame inoffensive thing is man, when death has laid his hands upon him! The very apprehension of death checks our extravagance, allays our heats, subdues our unruly wills, suppresses our vicious affections, and brings our minds into temper, and our hearts into a proper frame. But then we must have these apprehensions of death in time, lest it be too late; lest it does not lead us to a new life, but carry us to a dreadful judgment, where we shall be made to know ourselves to our eternal sorrow and shame.

S E R M O N LXIV.

On the Passions, and how to govern them.

ACTS, xxiv. 15.

We also are men of like passions with you.

THE great business of religion is to mortify our lusts by the help of grace, and subdue our passions, those infirmities of our nature, and bring them into subjection to the Holy Spirit, whose fruits

are *love, joy, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, meekness, temperance*; and yet after all the advances we can make in virtue, the best proficient in grace may say with the disciples of nature, *we also are men of like passions with you*.—These words were spoken by Paul and Barnabas to the men of Lycaonia, to convince them they were not gods, and to restrain the people from offering sacrifices to them; a very modest, true, and ingenuous confession.

And yet perhaps it may seem strange, that an Apostle, renewed by the Holy Ghost, and endued with all the graces of the gospel, should make such an open profession of his passions, to the great disparagement of those other gifts. For as passion is a violent assault upon our reason, a turbulent motion in our hearts, if this must still take place, in spite of all the assistances of the spirit, where is that meekness, gentleness, and temperance, which are the ornaments and essentials of a Christian life? But so it is, that the best of men are subject to passions and infirmities; this is a truth which all good men are not ashamed to confess, and none but bad men will deny.

Indeed, when we come to heaven, we shall shake off these distempers of our nature, and our souls will be purified and refined; but whilst we are in the body, they are too deeply rooted in our senses, for either our religion or reason to extirpate. Moses, the meekest of men, slew an Egyptian in his anger; David, the devoutest of men, was in his devotion transported with anger; our Saviour, the most patient of men, was once overwhelmed with sorrow: and even the apostles tell the heathens, that they were men of like passions with them; by which it appears that religion was designed only to improve and not extinguish nature. It was this very point that raised a controversy between two famed sects of antient philosophers; the one was for governing and keeping under the passions of man; and their design was good: the other required that they should be totally abolished and extirpated; but this was impracticable. They were not contented with the nature God had given them, but were for new making man after an image of their own. By this great mistake they rendered their lives uncomfortable, and their doctrines disagreeable; and by their philosophy

proved, that nature may be managed, but cannot be forced. And yet were it possible for a man to force his nature, and divest himself of passion, it is a question whether this be desirable; since our souls would be very flat and insipid without them. Our reason would be too weak to support our virtue, and man would at best be a heavy unactive creature, without our passions to encourage and excite us to good works.

But to this a stoic may object, that our passions incline us to evil as well as good, which betray us into sin and danger, and therefore ought to be rooted out. Indeed, it must be owned, that all our sins proceed from some misguided passion; but God made us subject to those passions for the exercise of our religion, that by a right management of ourselves, between our vicious inclinations to chuse the evil, and our religious endeavours to pursue the good, we might try our obedience, and recommend our virtue. Did we lie under a natural necessity of doing good, what honour would our good works bring to God? And if we had no temptation to evil, what praise would the avoiding it bring to ourselves? The difficulty and danger of the enterprize is what makes it honourable; for without opposition, there can be no conquest. But it may be said that our passions make us more liable to evil than to good; and more likely to be conquered than to conquer. And yet this is no argument for our passions to be rooted out, since we find it recorded in scripture, that the best men have been subject to the greatest failings, the sense of which has made them the greater saints. No man was more exemplary in his virtue than David, and none more notorious in his vice. No man more glorious in his undertakings than St. Peter, and none more shameful in his falls. And as the excellencies of these men have done more honour to God, and service to the church, than their failings; therefore we ought not to extirpate our passions, and so destroy the good and evil together.

To this may be objected, that we deserve to be punished for the evil, but not to be rewarded for the good; and as our passions occasion both, were they discarded it would be better for us. To which I answer, that God in the judgment which he passes on men, will no doubt make

make allowance for their different constitutions. He knows whereof we are made, and that every man's constitution inclines him strongly to some one passion or other. And if we think that he expects the same from all persons, this would be to make him act arbitrarily by us, and not according to our ability. For instance; the scripture does not tell us that God expects the same temper of mind, the same evenness and steadiness of temper, from a sanguine man, as he does from the cold and phlegmatic; or that he requires the same fervent zeal, and ardour of devotion, from the phlegmatic, as he does from the warm and sanguine. Though both are obliged to struggle with their infirmities, yet nature will be nature still, and fall we shall sometimes. And we cannot but admire the excellency of the gospel above all other religions, for being so exactly calculated to the nature and abilities of men, requiring nothing of us, as necessary to salvation, but what we are able to perform. It gives us the best encouragement to be virtuous, and yet does not condemn us for every vice; it shews the true way to subdue our passions, and then offers us a pardon for those we could not overcome.

Indeed, our Saviour's coming upon earth and dying for us, plainly intimates that there are vicious principles within us which cannot be subdued; for had we not lain under a moral impossibility of avoiding sin, we needed not so extraordinary a redemption. And after the gospel was preached on earth, how many frailties of the apostles do we find recorded? frailties of men inspired by the Holy Ghost; frailties of those very men who are proposed to us as most eminent examples of piety and religion. How many frailties has St. Peter recorded of himself in St. Mark's gospel? How many more do we read of him and his brethren in the Acts of the Apostles? How hot was the contest between him and St. Paul, who withstood him to the face? How sharp was the dispute between St. Paul and Barnabas? In my text we find them both promoting the honour of God like friends, and modestly declaring they were subject to passions like other men; which they soon after verified, being so angry with each other, that they parted. And why do these things stand upon perpetual record in God's book, by the direction of the Holy

Spirit, but for our notice, and to inform us, that there is nothing perfect upon earth; that they who have the most grace, will still retain a taint of their nature; that though our virtue be ever so strongly guarded, yet some passion or other will frequently creep in.

From hence we may learn, not to cast off our trust in God, nor yet be discouraged from performing the duties of religion, though our passions shall sometimes break in upon us; for this they did on the apostles themselves. And if we could be but men of like virtues, we need not be uneasy that we are of like passions with them. We are also to take care that we do not condemn other men for passions, though they are not the same to which we are subject. For we are men of like passions with them, if not the same; and ought to judge favourably of their failings, as we hope God will of ours.

Another instruction we may learn from these words, is, that it is not for the reputation of our religion, to dissemble or deny those passions we are possessed of, though we could thereby gain honour to ourselves. The apostles Paul and Barnabas, having wrought a miraculous cure upon an impotent man at Lystra, the people concluded they were gods, and were preparing sacrifices for them. Had the apostles been ambitiously inclined, they had a fair opportunity to be deified. But they not only modestly and zealously disclaimed the title of god, but proclaimed their own failings; *we also are men of like passions with yourselves.* Hence may those who affect to be esteemed godly men, without sin or passion, receive very proper instruction; they may here learn, that virtue and humility, modesty and piety, must always go together. Certainly there is no sin so odious as hypocrisy; no passion so dangerous, as when concealed. And yet were the dishonour, danger, and disgrace of hypocrisy only to ourselves, it would not be so criminal. But it reflects upon religion also, and makes it despicable in the sight of men, by which God is dishonoured.

We are too apt to be puffed up with pride; God has therefore instituted a holy religion, on purpose to humble us; to shew us the vileness of our nature, to convince us of the malignity of our sins, that

that we may give God the glory, and take shame unto ourselves.

Our passions are a demonstration that we are men. For which reason God has inseparably annexed them to our nature, and made them a necessary condition of our mortality; and there is no living in this world without them. A religion that does open violence to our nature can never gain credit in the world, or be thought to come from God, who gave us life and being. To bid a man throw off all his passions, never to be angry, or sorry, or afraid, is a command that never came from God. Indeed, he has given us some restraining precepts, as not to *be angry unto sin; not to be sorrowful as men without hope; not to be afraid where no fear is.* But absolutely to renounce these passions is more than God commands, because it is more than man can do; nay, more than our Saviour did. In truth, whoever pretends to be void of passion, must be either more or less than man. But for us, who are really subject to passions, to conceal them, that we may be thought like gods, is the only way to make us proud and arrogant, crafty and malicious. The sum of all is this; God has put passions into our nature for several useful ends; but as the best things in nature are liable to be abused, so are our passions. We must therefore endeavour to correct and keep them under; but to extirpate them is impossible, and to conceal them dangerous.

Having thus seen that our passions cannot be rooted out, and ought not to be disguised, we are next to consider, how they may be so managed as to be serviceable to religion. And if we would have our passions useful to us, we must take care that they be well regulated, subdued, and governed; or otherwise they will be of no service to us. And the best way to do this, will be seriously to reflect on the passions we are guilty of, and consider the many inconveniences which the excess of them exposes us to. How uneasy and vexatious they are to ourselves, how reproachful and hateful to others! how they debar us from the use of our reason, silence all the precepts of religion, run us headlong upon all kind of dangers, and so furiously assault us, as scarce to leave us the command of our senses! Surely this is enough to make us afraid and ashamed of being blindly or

madly led by them. And yet they are generally raised about trifles, or mere bubbles; it is these we pursue with so much eagerness and affection. And is it not surprising, to see a man restless and fretful, impatient and clamorous, for such trifling things; to be almost as zealously solicitous and as really concerned for them, as if his life was at stake? Nay, were they of much greater value, it cannot excuse us, for so vehement a pursuit, so hot a contention. Though it be the honour of God, and the interest of religion, that we are contending for, yet even here, by an imprudent management of our passions, we may prejudice a good cause. For certainly, without moderation, we neither do honour to God, nor service to religion. A zeal for truth must be expressed by such passion as is consistent with meekness, gentleness, and peace. In a word, whatever the occasion be, we must never suffer the passion to overpower our reason, but our business is, so to temper and manage it, as to keep it under. And when our passions are thus subdued, they are fit to be employed in the service of God, and may be useful to us in the exercises of religion: which brings me to consider how our passions should be employed.

The passions of men are a sort of evil spirit within us, that is too easily raised, and may do much hurt, if we do not find them some proper objects to work upon; and these are no where to be had but in religion. Here our passions may be of excellent use; either to promote our virtue, or increase our devotion. Certain it is, that when our passions are well regulated and reformed, they are great assistances and encouragements to virtue. Our reason is a cold heavy principle, that slowly moves us to our work; but passion puts an eagerness into our desires, warmth into our prosecutions, and makes business go cheerfully and vigorously on. Whenever therefore we find ourselves passionately engaged in the pursuit of our temporal affairs, in the advancing of our wealth, or promoting our pleasure; let us consider how much greater work we have to do, and turn our heat and zeal that way, and then we shall have cause to thank God for giving us these passions to assist us.

Our reason has little to do in forming our

our minds, and bringing us to a virtuous religious life; but it is our passions and affections must do this; for till they begin to move, our reason is like a chariot without wheels, that can never perform the journey. Our reason has not much to learn, and is easily taught; only our passions are obstinate, our affections perverse, and our wills crooked, so that we find it harder to be persuaded than informed. But when once we have got our passions at command, all obstacles are removed, the difficulty of our work is over, and then there is no virtue that we may not with ease attain.

As our virtue, so our devotion is much indebted to our passions; for a true religious zeal towards God, is only the kind workings of a pious and warm affection. There are in religion such substantial motives to piety, as are enough to make every man devout. As a passionate man's zeal is the soonest kindled, so the same warmth of constitution that inclines him to be intemperate, may, if well managed, excite him to be devout; and therefore we have no reason to be ashamed or afraid of those passions which God has implanted in our nature; since we find by pleasing experience, that they may become the most excellent means of grace. They may, if we rightly manage them, prove encouragements to our virtue, and helps to our devotion; they may tend to promote our meekness, gentleness, goodness, and all the fruits of the spirit. What has been said of our passions in general, I will now illustrate by a few particulars. And, first,

With respect to anger. This passion bears an ill name, and is frequently a troublesome companion, by engaging us in quarrels and disputes, so that one would think we might be better without it. And yet even this passion may be made of excellent use to us, not only by securing our persons from such indignities as may be unreasonably offered us; but as a guard and centinel to our virtue. It may caution us not to be surprised by vice, nor tempted to approve of those things which are pernicious to us. Nay sometimes our anger turns upon ourselves, and grows warm against our bosom sin; so that by the help of this passion, we may cast an evil spirit, when our reason alone could not effect it. What has been said of anger, may in part be applied to hatred,

disdain, and pride; passions which occasion much evil, and yet by prudent management may be turned to a religious use, and do as much service. But envy, malice, and detraction can be of no good use; they being pure vice, without any mixture of virtue.

Another troublesome companion to man is fear; a treacherous passion appointed to give us fair warning of dangers, and yet it often needlessly disturbs us by false alarms, and representing dangers nearer and greater than they really are. It awakens our jealousy, increases our apprehensions, and anticipates our pain, so that one might almost think it might be well spared. And yet would we but set this passion right, and apply it to its proper object, there is not a more noble, a more useful principle in our nature. A heathen poet said it was the foundation of all religion. The divine Psalmist says, it is *the beginning of wisdom*. And those men whose constitution inclines them to be fearful, have a great advantage on this account: for if we are afraid of a little transient pain, a touch of the lancet, or prick of the sword, how much more tenderly ought we to be affected with the apprehensions of eternal death, and endless torments? If we are afraid of disobliging a man, because he may hurt us; how much more shall we stand in awe of God, who is ever present with us, and by the word of his mouth can speak us dead? If we are so apt to be terrified with every little accident, from the wind, the earthquake, and the fire; how can we but be astonished at the thoughts of that day, when the earth itself shall fall from under us, *and the heavens shall melt with fervent heat*? If we are subject to be fearful, let us be afraid of these things, and then our fear will prove our best preservative. If we set the passions in the right way, they may be made at all times useful and serviceable to us.

Lastly, I shall mention but one passion more, and that is pity: a passion that seems to be implanted in us for the sake of that most excellent Christian duty, charity: a passion that makes us partake of the griefs, fears, and pains of other men, and is therefore properly called compassion. It was the passion of pity which occasioned the apostles declaration in the text; it being the cure of a poor, impotent

tent man, that made them pass for gods; and which forced them to declare they were subject to passions like other men. It must be allowed, that this was the most natural error that idolaters could be subject to; for there is nothing so apt to gain us true veneration and esteem, as the relieving the wants of others, and making their misfortunes our own. In nothing shall we appear so much like God, as by having a provident care, a tender concern for the good of his creatures. This is so kind, so humane, so generous a passion, and so religious a duty, that it is difficult to say, whether it be most nearly allied to nature or to grace. It is in truth the top and perfection of both. It is that love which leads to all the graces of the gospel, and brings us to joy, peace, gentleness, goodness, and whatever is valuable and praise-worthy.

Love is the tenderest affection of the human soul, the first-fruits of the spirit; therefore let us shew our love in the most natural, the most religious way; and that is by our pity. There are many poor, many indigent persons among us, that stand in need of our relief; and though we cannot assist them in that miraculous manner the apostles did, yet silver and gold we have, and should also have pity and compassion, and let us give of what we have. Those who please and magnify themselves for their good temper, and think to pass for gods, by being void of passion, will act according to their opinion; but God grant that we may shew ourselves to be men, by employing our passions agreeably to reason, as the apostles did, and then they will tend to the honour of God, and the benefit of mankind. I will now propose some means, fit and proper to be used by us, to have our passions under rule and government.

There is a great difference between those who have been long subject to the power of unruly lusts and passions, and such as have rather evil inclinations than sinful habits to overcome; because it is more difficult to reform the former than the latter; the thought of which should prevail on all young persons, to curb and restrain their affections betimes. And that our passions and lusts may not get the dominion over it, we must be careful to oppose and check them at first, before they become inordinate. We must be so vigilant as timely to rebuke and stifle all ma-

licious, revengeful, proud, unclean, covetous, or repining thoughts, at their first starting up in our minds; for we must not play with and encourage any corrupt and impure imaginations, or wicked thoughts. When we cherish in our hearts covetous, lustful, or envious inclinations, we put our passions into a ferment, and so by degrees they rise to that height as to get the mastery of us, and then we are hurried into all kinds of sin and misery. So dangerous are such beginnings as these, that the devil, when he discovers them in us, takes advantage thereof, and brings us at last to commit the greatest wickedness, and the vilest crimes, without fear or shame.

We must therefore carefully resist the first motions and inclinations to sin, lest they break out into inordinate unruly passions; for it will be much easier to do this at first than when they have gained power over us. This advice is very proper for those whose passions are grown headstrong, and have long held them in captivity. Let such strive to avoid the temptations to his lusts, whatever it be, and oppose and weaken the first attacks, thereby to prevent the ill effects that might otherwise ensue. A little advantage is not inconsiderable and to be despised. A person who hath been long contracting an evil habit must be content to mend by degrees; and by gradually gaining ground, he will at last obtain a complete conquest over himself. Men of furious and choleric tempers, by constant resolution, by suddenly rebuking themselves after they have been surprised, and continuing in this good way, have at length attained a spirit of meekness and patience. And if once we gain a rectitude of temper, the government of our passions will not be difficult. In order to this we must be renewed in the spirit of our mind. A meek-spirited man is not apt to break out into fury, nor a patient spirit to fall into despair, nor a philosopher of an even temper to be extravagantly raised or depressed at prosperity or adversity. The chief difficulty lies in reforming the disposition of our souls, and renewing the inner man. It is not so hard for a bad man to abstain from one single act of sin, or to do a thing that is good, as to be converted from an evil temper, which leads him to vice, and renders him averse to virtue. Thus it is easier for a miser

miser to give an alms upon occasion, than to be cured of that covetousness which is ever a root of injustice and uncharitableness. It is easier for a choleric person to curb and suppress his passion and wrath now and then, than totally to subdue that hastiness of spirit, which upon any provocation prompts him to anger. It is easier for a licentious voluptuary to deny himself sometimes a vicious pleasure, than quite to throw off the power of temptation. But however difficult this may be, it must be done. We must cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of spirit, and be transformed by the renewing of our minds.

We must not forget to make our prayers to God, that he who giveth wisdom liberally and upbraideth not, would teach us the wisdom of governing our passions, and by the aid of his Holy Spirit, give us the victory over them; that he would create in us a clean heart, and renew a right spirit within us, and sanctify us throughout. When an unruly passion is subdued, and a bad temper corrected, we have as it were obtained a new nature, and this is to be born anew, or of God. For these great blessings we must depend upon God by daily and fervent prayer. And all our vigilance and pains with ourselves, and our earnest intreaties at the throne of grace, we must particularly apply against that sin which does so easily beset us, against that passion we have the least under command; for that which exposeth us to the first mischief, requires the greatest care and strength to subdue it. We must labour to set nature right where most crooked: this will give us rule over all our passions, because the government of the rest will more easily follow. And if we once keep our ground, we shall maintain the inward quiet and security of our minds, and being freed from the bondage of sin, we shall enjoy the happy liberty of the children of God.

SERMON LXV.

By BISHOP GIBSON.

Of Temperance in Eating and Drinking.

I COR. ix. 25.

Every man that striveth for the mastery, is temperate in all things; now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown, but we an incorruptible.

THE apostle here alludes to those games and races that were celebrated among the Corinthians, in which the victors were rewarded with crowns and garlands; and such were their desires after these victories and rewards, that they who strove for the prize, regulated their diet and exercise, in order to improve their strength and activity; cheerfully submitting to the strictest abstinence, and denying themselves their most beloved pleasures. They were temperate in all things, or, as the original better expresses it, they were resolutely temperate and regular, so that nothing could break their constancy and resolution; and if they could do all this to obtain a corruptible crown, much much more should we Christians willingly and cheerfully submit to such regulations and self-denials as the gospel requires; and not be tempted to any excess, when we have in our eye an incorruptible and immortal crown of glory. Though these words may be so taken, as to signify an universal government over our inordinate appetites and desires; yet in this place, the apostle more immediately alludes to the discipline observed at the games and races, with respect to a strict regulation in meats and drinks. But by shewing what are the proper rules and measure of a regular use of these, the great sinfulness of any irregular abuse of them will more evidently appear both in itself, in its consequence, and effects. However, it should be observed, that the constitutions, ages, and other circumstances of men being so very different, there can be no one fixed rule or measure in this point; because the same proportion, which to one person may not be a sufficient nourishment; may to another be excess; so that what is necessary or convenient, within the bounds of moderation, must in great measure be left

to the judgment of every Christian, upon an honest and conscientious regard to the true ends of eating and drinking; namely, the preserving of life, the refreshing the spirits, the preparing ourselves for the business of that station wherein God's providence hath placed us.

As God hath planted in every man a natural desire of life, so the first and most immediate end of eating and drinking is for the preservation of it. But then we are always to remember, that it is life we are to provide for, and not luxury; that the using God's creatures more liberally than nature requires or can bear, is not the way to preserve, but to shorten and destroy life; and that it is very sinful, ungrateful, and unreasonable, for us to suffer an inordinate appetite to turn those blessings to the destruction of life, which God graciously gives us for the preservation of it. Not that we are to live by weight and measure, or were presently guilty of sin, if we exceed what will barely support life, for this is impossible; and besides, the fear of transgressing would fill the mind with perpetual scruples, and deprive us of the enjoyment of God's gifts: but the guard and caution which God requires of us, is, to keep from what will weaken and destroy life; and there is so great a difference between what will barely support, or overcharge nature, that we may, by observing a due proportion, very innocently enjoy the blessings of heaven.

Another end of eating and drinking, is to repair and refresh the spirits, when wasted by thought and business. It has pleased God to clothe our souls with bodies of a weak, heavy, and unactive constitution, which cannot endure long application of any kind, without growing faint, weary, and uneasy; and therefore he has provided meats and drinks in the nature of remedies, to revive and refresh the drooping spirits, and give new life and vigour to the whole. But then we must use them so as God intended; not to neglect or lay aside our natural strength and vigour, but only to assist nature when faint and drooping. We must not apply these remedies but when nature requires them, either when we are hungry and thirsty, or tired with thought and labour; nor must we apply them in larger proportions, than what will fairly answer the needs and necessities of nature. But if men, out of

luxury, or a desire to please the appetite, to pamper the body, or to comply with custom, and a habit of indulgence, will be continually refreshing nature, when she has no need, or overcharge her when she has; this is a direct abuse of God's blessings, clogs the spirits, instead of refreshing them, and by using nature to such needless aids, makes her lose her own strength, by craving a perpetual supply of artificial spirits; till by degrees men have no power to resist the importunity of such appetites, nor any life, any vigour left, but what they derive from those false flames which will quickly expire, and end in a fatal stupidity. This is the most wretched state into which man can sink; and changes the human into a brutal nature. For what is there that more distinguishes men from brutes than the government of the appetite? and when that is lost, they are only beasts in the shape of men; and yet so bewitching are the pleasures of state, and so easily are men's appetites corrupted, that with a little indulgence, they will insensibly sink into this miserable condition; and which nothing can prevent, but a serious regard to the real necessities of nature, uninfected by habit, together with steadfast resolutions to apply these refreshments only when they are proper and needful; and in such proportions as may make them a real refreshment, and not a burden by excess.

Another end of eating and drinking is, to fit and prepare us for the business of that station in which God's providence hath placed us. For every man, high or low, rich or poor, hath some certain work or business to do in the world; and by the wisdom and goodness of God, he affords us those blessings, to enable us to perform these with comfort and success; and therefore we ought to use and apply them in such a manner, as may make them most subservient to our daily business, calling, and profession. And this we do when we make the seasons of eating and drinking what they ought to be, only short retreats from business, and not the business of life; when we take care in due time to return to the duties of our calling, and bring with us understanding and abilities, sufficient to pursue it: and when we unbend our minds, which is sometimes necessary, to let it be seldom, and without any mixture of excess. An enjoyment of the blessings of life within these rules, is truly

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a repairing of our strength and spirits, and a real furtherance in our daily business; and being so, is a sober and temperate use of our meats and drinks, and answers the end for which God gave them. But when these refreshments are long and frequent, and consume much time that might be otherwise usefully and beneficially employed; when men have no other aim in invigorating the spirits, by the liberal enjoyments of God's blessings, but to spend them in mirth and jollity; when so far from designing them as preparatives to business, they cannot bear to think of returning to business, or when their excesses have left them neither sense nor reason to attend it; then is such a conduct an irregular and sinful abuse of God's creatures.

And this intolerable waste of time is greatly aggravated by the expence of treasure thereby occasioned, which in the richer sort is a defrauding of their indigent neighbours, who are to partake of their superfluous wealth; and in the poorer sort, is the robbing of their own needy families, which ought to be their daily and immediate care. And both rich and poor will find these no small aggravations of the guilt of gluttony and drunkenness, when they come to render an account at the last day. Nor will it be any excuse to say, they were unavoidably led to these excesses, by their concerns in the world; since were it not also their inclination, the business and the excess may be easily separated, where there is a sober virtuous mind. But instead of making this a pretence for their intemperance, they should be very watchful against such temptations, and earnestly pray for God's grace, to be delivered therefrom. And if we duly attend to what has been observed, we shall be able to judge, not only what are the proper bounds of sobriety and temperance, and when we exceed them; but also how great and heinous the guilt of that excess is, and how basely we abuse the blessings of God; in our forgetting their proper ends, by perverting them to purposes directly contrary thereto; in turning that to the destruction of life which God gave for the preservation of it; in our making that the means of stupifying the spirits, by which he designed to raise and refresh them; in transforming ourselves into the state of brutes by those helps, which he

bestowed for the more vigorous discharge of the duties of rational creatures; and in making that the occasion of indisposing us for the business of life, which God graciously gives to support us under it. Such is the sinfulness of an inordinate use of meats and drinks in itself, as it perverts the true ends of the blessings of God, and is a shameful abuse of human nature. I shall now proceed to consider the sad effects and bad consequences of this sin.

Every sin is in some respect contrary to us. Some sins are hurtful to our bodies, others to our souls. Some waste our fortunes, others ruin our reputation. Some are very bad in their own nature, and others are attended with fatal consequences. But the sin of drunkenness is equally hurtful to soul and body; it is as bad in itself, as in its consequences; and has an ill influence on human society in general, and on those who are guilty of it in particular. Was I to describe all the ill characters of this vice, the description would be so frightful and surprising, that one would really wonder how it is possible that human nature should sink into so base and infamous, so hurtful and desperate a vice; for nothing so much wears the body, wastes the life and strength of man, as drunkenness. It fires the blood, weakens the stomach, and often puts a speedy end to life, by fevers, sad diseases, or other fatal accidents, to which a man is then exposed; and where a constitution is so strong as to escape this, yet the certain slow waste that these disorders bring, seldom suffer such men to live out half their days. Gouts and other infirmities are severe reckonings, that they must pay for those unruly liberties they have allowed themselves. And hence arise many quarrels among men, whose passions being inflamed, while their reason is extinguished, do often end fatally. This vice is the great corrupter of young persons who are drawn in and ensnared by the mirth and gaiety that accompany it, and from hence proceed many irregularities. The wise man elegantly describes this: *Who hath woe? who hath sorrow? who hath contentions? who hath babbling? who hath wounds without cause? who hath redness of eyes? they that tarry long at the wine. But at the last it biteth like a serpent, it stingeth like an adder. Thine eyes shall behold strange women,*

women, and thine heart shall utter perverse things. Both swearing and lewdness are the ordinary effects of it. *Yea, thou shalt be as he that lieth down in the midst of the sea, or as he that lieth upon the top of the mast:—a drunken man being exposed to so many dangers, which he can neither foresee, nor prevent.*

There is nothing that more wastes a man's time and fortune than drunkenness. It makes him forget God, himself, and his neighbour. The time he should employ for improving his mind, looking after his affairs, or doing good to others, is thrown away in those brutal excesses; so that, as the wise man says, *The drunkard and the glutton shall come to poverty; and drowsiness (or laziness) shall clothe a man with rags.* That hard drinking insensibly brings on sloth and great carelessness, by which men first neglect, and then ruin their affairs, is too notorious to require any proof. It also makes men remiss in the concerns of their families, and wanting in all the respects due to their relations, friends, or neighbours. But the worst part of this vice appears in this, that our reason, and all the powers of our souls, fall under such disorders and unruly violences, that a man, while he is under the power of wine or strong liquor, is transformed into a beast or madman. Our reason is the image of God, the glory of our nature, and the guide of our life: and God has plentifully supplied us with meat and drink, that by these our bodies may be rendered capable to serve our minds. But when men abuse these by excess, they not only waste and misapply the good creatures of God, but do also contradict the ends of nature, deprive themselves of the free use of their reason, and which usually produces in some a spirit of rage, passion, and cruelty; in others, fullness, obstinacy, and ill nature; and in most, great folly and indecency in words and actions. Hence often proceed riots and excesses, swearing and railing, fighting and murder. And all these are so many aggravations of the sin of immoderate drinking; and are such as men know by their own repeated experience to be the usual effects of it. And thus, whereas the chief study of every wise and good man ought to be, to perfect his reason, and raise his nature to the highest pitch; a drunkard

labours to debase and depress it all he possibly can.

Some men of stronger heads will perhaps think themselves unconcerned in all this, because being used to hard drinking, it has no visible effect on them. But let such seriously consider these words: *Woe unto them that rise up early in the morning, that they may follow strong drink, that continue until night, till wine inflames them!—And woe unto them that are mighty to drink wine, and men of strength to mingle strong drink!* Such men are generally the plagues of the places where they live, being the instruments of corrupting all about them, tempting them to waste their strength, to ruin their families and constitutions. Thus it appears that drunkenness carries with it a complication of evils, equally destructive to soul and body. But there is another species of intemperance, that seems not so criminal, because not attended with so many fatal symptoms; I mean those who are not quite intoxicated, and therefore think themselves free of the heavy charge that falls upon it; and yet habituate themselves to drinking of wine or strong liquor when their bodies no way require it. Some think it a decent and hospitable way of entertaining friends to be frequently putting the glass about, without which they imagine conversation grows heavy, and that the master of the house is too frugal of his liquor. But besides the waste of time and of God's good creatures by means of such tipling, an excessive heat is raised in the blood, which insensibly impairs nature, and brings on such a habit, that they cannot refrain from drinking, and this in time corrupts their health, and enfeebles their minds.

To all these arguments against this vice, arising from the nature of our souls and bodies, there is another very strong one which the Christian religion affords. When St. Paul reckons up the works of darkness, in which the Romans had lived while heathens, which Christians were obliged to avoid, he begins with this; *Let us walk honestly as in the day; not in rioting and drunkenness; not in strife and envy.* And the same apostle, comparing the gospel to light, and heathenism to darkness, observes, *That they*

that be drunken are drunken in the night; but let us who are of the day be sober. And our Saviour bids us,—*take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting and drunkenness, and the cares of this life; and so that day come upon us unawares.* St. Paul also reckons drunkenness among the works of the flesh, and says, *that those who do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God.* Besides what appears from these passages of scripture, there is a more general consideration, which shews how contrary this sin is to the spirit and design of the gospel; which directs us to *mortify our bodies with its lusts and affections; to subdue our appetites, to crucify the old man, and to bring our bodies into subjection to our minds.* The main design of the New Testament is, to make us consider ourselves as pilgrims on earth, daily to remember that we must soon leave this world, and therefore ought to prepare for another. We are called upon to live after, and to walk according to the spirit; not to indulge our irregular appetites and desires; but as far as our state of health and life will permit, to deny all unnecessary gratifications. These are the rules, and this is the spirit of the gospel; so that, if we duly consider things, we have arguments sufficient to deter us from this sin.

But what then must we think or say of our age, in which this corruption so universally prevails over all ranks and degrees of persons, so that scarce any are to be found who have escaped it? Some of a more brutal kind, are overcome with the mere love of the liquor, though it be so shameful an excess, that no one will own it. Others know not how to dispose of their time, being bred to nothing, and hardly capable of any thing. And because of mere idleness, to get time off their hands, they run into these extravagancies, in which days and nights are spent. And yet no man can have been so neglected in his education, but that he may find somewhat to do if he will. He may and ought to look into his own affairs, and apply himself to some sort of industry. He may find out some good company to converse with, and some occasions to do acts of kindness and charity to others; so that a man may, if he will, employ his time to many good purposes.

A pleasant conversation is no doubt very agreeable, and to have it moderately enlivened and refreshed, with some generous liquor, can be no crime; but cannot men have mirth and be merry without being drunk or mad? Is there no measure to such folly? It may therefore well be said, that the end of such mirth is madness. For to play with our health and life, our fortune and reputation, above all with our souls and eternity, is a madness beyond expression; and yet these are the men who often pretend to wit and sense. Some indeed are carried against their own inclination, merely by ill example and custom; till at last habit and practice make it familiar to them. But it is a strange degree of perverseness, that men will become a sort of martyrs for their vices. They would think it extremely hard, were they obliged to endure so much in the practice of religion and virtue as they suffer by the sin of intemperance. But dissolute habits do not change the nature of things: for though they may grow less shameful and reproachful, by being common, yet they are not the less evil. And that man must have a very weak mind, who is ashamed of being wise and sober, because others are irregular and extravagant. Some there are, who think they cannot be hospitable and free-hearted without sending their friends and servants home intoxicated. But this is a very unsuitable return of a civil visit; to endeavour to destroy the health of him who in kindness comes to see him, and perhaps to endanger his life in going home. The imputation of covetousness, which some are afraid of, may easily be removed by acts of charity to the poor, or generosity to the afflicted and unfortunate. These are noble instances of true goodness and largeness of soul, by which others are both benefited and relieved. Thus it appears, how weak all those excuses are, which these mad sort of people make use of to palliate such an enormous practice.

And among the miseries of this unhappy state, it is none of the least, that where an inordinate appetite reigns, reason and consideration are shut out; and when men are deduced to such a thoughtless condition, they generally go on without any sense, either of their sin or danger; and without any view beyond their

present enjoyment. And nothing can awaken them out of this stupid state, but a great resolution, and serious reflection on the brutal condition in which these indulgences have brought them; on the shameful abuses of God's blessings, and their own rational faculties, in which it has betrayed them; and to what dreadful miseries it will bring them at last. These reflections imprinted on their hearts, may by God's blessing produce a happy change, and deliver them from their misery and danger. For though custom is very powerful, especially in the present case, yet it has not force enough to make that necessary to nature which is destructive of it, as all excess must be. But so far from this indulgence being necessary to life, that when a long course of intemperance has endangered it, the leaving that course is always the first prescription, without which all other remedies are useless and ineffectual. So that what they call necessary to preserve life, tends only to satisfy a craving and inordinate appetite; the gratifying of which is the direct and immediate means of destroying life. And it is therefore no wonder, that an indulgence which has been long continued should be uneasy under the first check or restraint. But if there be a steady resolution to restrain the current of desire, the appetite will, by degrees, grow more patient and quiet, and such persons will find more pleasure in governing than they ever did by indulging it.

Let then those who have indulged themselves in a habit of intemperance, stand still and consider, that they are in the worst state of slavery; a slavery of reason to appetite, of the human to the brutal part. Let them resolve to assert the freedom and dignity of their nature, and if they have lived like beasts, to die like men. Let them reflect how they have abused the blessings of God to luxury and excess: with how much goodness he has borne their provocations, and waited for their amendment. And let a sense of his

mercy and their own vileness produce in them that godly shame and sorrow, which worketh repentance to salvation. But if neither the force of reason nor religion will prevail, let the terrors of the Lord persuade them not to continue in a course that must shortly end in their eternal destruction. If the work be difficult, it is also necessary; and let men consider, whether they shall be uneasy now, or miserable for ever. The difficulty of the work should excite their resolution; and by constant prayers to God, he will strengthen and assist them.

It must be owned that the condition of such a person, though not desperate, is exceeding dangerous; and the more so, as there are but few instances of any who are reclaimed from it. And a state so dangerous should be powerful warnings to others not to be betrayed into the same kind of slavery, by luxury and indulgence. The only way to avoid the danger is, at first to govern and restrain the appetite, to keep under the body, and bring it into subjection. Such restraints and self-denials are a necessary means to preserve and secure men's innocence, and keep them from falling into excess. So that the only way to be safe and innocent, is to keep an habitual guard and restraint upon the appetite, from a due sense of the true ends and uses of eating and drinking; of the great wickedness of abusing God's blessings, to the dishonour of religion, to the shame and reproach of human nature; and of the unspeakable danger and misery of living and dying in habits of excess, both as to this world and the next. And with these considerations, there must be frequent and earnest prayer to God, that he will preserve upon their minds a lively sense of these things, and mercifully afford such supplies of grace and strength as will be needful to prevent those evil habits, and effectually to restrain all such acts of irregularity and excess as naturally lead to them.

S E R M O N LXVI.

By ARCHBISHOP SHARPE.

Character of an Upright Man.

PSALM cxii. 4.

To the upright there ariseth light in the darkness.

THIS psalm seems to be an explication or paraphrase on the words of St. Paul: *godliness hath the promise of this life, as well as of that which is to come.* And here we have a description of the pious man, and of his blessedness in this life. His piety is described in the following terms: He is one who fears God, and delights in his commandment; he is righteous and upright in his conversation; he is prudent, and guides his affairs with discretion: he has a great sense of God, on whom his heart is fixed, trusting in the Lord; he is charitable, gracious, and full of compassion; he sheweth favour and lendeth; he hath dispersed and given to the poor.—His blessedness is thus represented: His posterity shall be great and happy; his seed shall be mighty upon earth; the generation of the upright shall be blessed. His fortune shall be ample and plentiful; riches and plenteousness shall be in his house. His fame and reputation shall be lasting, his righteousness remaineth for ever; he shall be had in everlasting remembrance. His honour, power, and dignity shall excite the envy of the wicked; his horn shall be exalted with honour, the wicked shall see it and be grieved. Lastly, he shall be safe and secure in troublesome times: *To the upright there ariseth light in the darkness.* Such light shall arise to an upright man in evil times, as that he shall not be moved, neither shall he be afraid of evil tidings; for his heart is established, and he shall not shrink, until he sees his desire upon his enemies, or is delivered out of his distresses.

Of these several characters ascribed to a pious man, I shall recommend to your present consideration his uprightness; and of the several instances of his blessedness shall only observe those of safety and security, in times perilous and troublesome: *To the upright there ariseth light in the darkness.* The character of the person to whom

the promise of blessedness is made, is the upright man, or a man of honesty and integrity. By uprightness is meant the conformity of a man's mind to the eternal rules of righteousness, and the agreement of his actions to the principles of his mind: so that, in general, an upright man is one who in all things follows the dictates of his conscience, and makes his duty the rule of his actions. But the more lively to display his amiable qualities to our imitation, it will be proper to consider him more particularly with respect to God and men; both as to his religion, and his civil conversation.

A religious carriage towards God is essentially necessary to uprightness. *He that walketh in uprightness feareth the Lord.* Take away religion and the fear of God, the foundation of uprightness is destroyed. He that hath no sense of God and religion can never think himself bound to observe any rules in his actions and behaviour, but what are subservient to his private, sensual, and worldly interest; and consequently whatever is inconsistent therewith, be it never so base, vile, and injurious, he may act and execute without restraint, whenever a temptation offers; and yet think himself as innocent, and his actions as commendable, as if he had been truly honest and virtuous.

He therefore that is an upright man, hath a serious and hearty sense of God and religion on his mind, and is ever careful to preserve and encrease it. But then he is not contented with a mere speculative belief, an outward profession of religious truths; but he has them so impressed on his heart, as to influence his whole life and conversation. He thinks it not sufficient to be orthodox in his opinions, or a member of a true church; zealous in maintaining and promoting the right way; but he strives to live as he believes, to practise suitably to the profession he makes. As he holds fast the form of godliness, so he is careful to express the power of it, in an innocent, virtuous life. He takes not up his principles to advance his interest, or please a party; but he believes what appears true, and professes it because it is his duty. He neither chuses his religion out of worldly considerations, nor leaves it on such motives; but is resolute and constant in bearing testimony to the truth against all opposition. He is one who thinks religion too sacred

to be prostituted to mean purposes; and therefore never uses it as an instrument to serve any base end, though he was sure thereby to compass his designs. He is a man who does not place his religion in outward forms and services, but hath a nobler sense of God than to think such things are pleasing to him; and therefore his principal concern is about the great indispensable duties of Christianity; *the weightier matters of the law, justice, mercy, and faith.* He hath the everlasting notions and differences of good and evil deeply engraven in his heart; and how to practise the one and avoid the other, is his chief study. He endeavours uprightly and sincerely to observe all God's commands; calls no sin little, because his temper inclines him to it; but at all times preserves an uniform aversion to whatever is evil. He is an utter enemy to all factions in religion, and though he loves truth, is not less concerned for peace. He is better pleased with his charity to compose and reconcile religious differences, than with all his skill and abilities to dispute them; for he knows that love is more acceptable to God than a right opinion. Lastly, he is religious without noise, and uses no little arts to make his piety known. He seeks not the praise of men, but studies only to approve himself to God; and is therefore as careful of his thoughts as of his actions. He fears God, and regards his duty as much when no one sees him, as if the eyes of all were upon him. These are the great instances of uprightness as to religion: and whoever makes good these characters, may reasonably conclude himself an honest man towards God, a true Israelite indeed, in whom there is no guile.

If we take a view of the upright man in his civil conversation, as to his carriage and demeanor towards men; it will be proper to consider him as a private person, and a magistrate. As a private person, he will so frame and model his whole conversation, take such a prudent and diligent care of himself and his own good, as is consistent with, and tends to promote the good and happiness of others. He considers that every man has a right to be happy as well as himself; and since none can be so without the assistance of others, he thinks it reasonable that he should contribute his endeavours towards it. These being the main prin-

ciples of his mind, he is careful that his actions and whole conversation are suitable thereto. He is therefore exactly just in all his dealings, not knowingly doing wrong or injury to any one, though he could gain ever so much without being discovered. He is faithful to his trust, never taking advantage of another's credulity, nor abusing the confidence reposed in him. He is a man of great candour, of sweet and obliging behaviour; careful not to suffer by good nature, and yet ready to be kind and assist others, unless attended with great inconvenience to himself; but what he once promises he punctually performs, though it be prejudicial to him. He is a man that loves, and is as tender of a good name and reputation as any one; but scorns to use any evil arts to procure or preserve it. He hates mean and servile compliances, and will not speak or act against the sense of his own mind, to humour any man. Flattery and dissimulation he abhors; envy and detraction he is above. He never lessens another to make himself greater, nor repines at his neighbour's prosperity. He puts a fair construction on men's words and actions, rather concealing a fault than report it worse than it is. He hopes and thinks the best of all men, and does the most good he can. He is plain, free, and open in his carriage; his words and thoughts always go together. Though he is watchful of opportunities to do himself good, and is careful to avoid dangers, yet he never uses indirect means to benefit or secure himself. He scorns to take advantage of any man's necessities, nor will undermine another to effect his own designs. Deceit and collusion are strangers to his dealing. He esteems a cunning intriguing man no better than a knave. In a word, all his designs are honest and just, such as tend to the good of the community as well as his own, but to no man's loss and detriment; and the means he makes use of to obtain his designs are so fair, that he cares not who knows them. This is the man that is upright in his conversation towards men; the man that to the wisdom of the serpent joins the innocence and simplicity of the dove.

Thus much of the upright man, as a private person; let us now view him under a more conspicuous character, and as a magistrate, intrusted with the management of

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of public affairs: and here we shall find him actuated by the same principles, and pursuing the same designs we have before mentioned; only his virtues, having another sphere and object, require a different consideration. The great thing he proposes by accepting any office, is the glory of God and the public good: the honour and dignity of the place, and other worldly advantages, are but secondary considerations with him. He studies not to ingratiate himself with men, but to discharge a good conscience. He has courage and resolution to do what is fit, just, and conducive to the public good; not discouraged from his duty by the menaces of the mighty, nor the murmurings of the multitude. He resolves not hastily, but maturely deliberates and considers before he determines. He does nothing precipitately, but impartially weighs what is represented to him. His ears are open to all parties; he debates without passion, prejudice, or prepossession. Neither profit nor friends can corrupt him to act in matters of right contrary to his inward sense. His care and study is chiefly employed on the public. He is ever sedulous to maintain the worship and service of God, to defend and encourage true religion; to suppress vice and debauchery, impiety and irreligion. *He is a father to the poor, and the cause which he knoweth not, he searcheth out; he breaketh the jaws of the wicked, and plucketh the spoils out of his teeth.* He studiously endeavours to preserve his allegiance to his prince, and his fidelity to the public; neither invading the rights of the one, nor injuring the liberties of the other. By his prudence and moderation he will endeavour to extinguish growing flames, and not add fuel to them; but will calm and allay men's jealousies, rather than excite and encrease them. To conclude; he is a man that fears God and honours the king, obeys the laws, and meddles not with them that are given to change.—I shall now proceed to represent the advantages and privileges, that an upright man enjoys in evil and dangerous times. *To the upright therefore there ariseth light in darkness.* By darkness is here meant any kind of straits, difficulties, or adversities. By light we are to understand either guidance and direction, safety and defence, or peace and joy, which ariseth to the upright man. And

To the upright there ariseth light in the darkness, taking light for guidance and direction. Be the times never so dark, he hath this happiness, that he is rarely at a loss how to conduct himself. He of all others most easily sees his way, it being plain, easy, and straight before him; but the ways of vice and wickedness are extremely rough and crooked. Whoever pursues evil designs, and is a slave to base affections, must necessarily be entangled in perpetual labyrinths; for having many different and inconsistent ends to pursue, he must unavoidably be often at a loss how to behave himself. If he goes this way, then something will be discovered which he studiously endeavoured to conceal; if that way, then some man or party is disoblinded, whose interest he stood in need of; if he takes a third way, perhaps he then destroys his main design. Such difficulties and perplexities always attend the man of intrigue, and every one who walks not uprightly. But the contrary of this is the lot of the upright man. For he has only one end to pursue; and that is, to discharge a good conscience. By this all his concerns are regulated; and of consequence he hath no clashing of interests to perplex his deliberations; no little turns to be served; all his resolutions are easily made, and he avoids most of those difficulties which entangle others. His counsels and methods are always the same, and he is never at a loss to behave himself on any emergency. His way is commonly so plain, that he requires little advice or instruction to find it: *The integrity of the upright shall guide him, the path of the just is a shining light.* Again,

If he happens to fall into such circumstances, as to stand in need of great advice and deliberation, yet the upright man hath vastly the advantage of others: because he always enjoys the free use of his intellectual powers, can exert his reason to its highest perfection and greatest advantage: whereas the man who has sinister ends to pursue, by indirect methods, is sadly clouded in his discerning faculties, so as to hinder him from distinguishing rightly, whereby he commits many blunders and mistakes. For whoever frames his mind by other measures than those of honesty and conscience; whoever intemperately pursues his private ends, or is a slave to inordinate passions of any sort; these things will so bias his soul, as to

render him incapable of making a true judgment of what is right; and expose him to many dangerous errors in the management of his affairs, even in matters of little difficulty. But the upright man is not obnoxious to any of these inconveniences; for having no turns to serve, but what are good and honest, nor no private affections or passions to be gratified, his conceptions of things are according to their nature, his determinations and resolutions are reasonable and proper, such as become the occasion. As his main design is to do in all instances what is best, so that preserves him from mistaking what is so. His reason and understanding are free and at liberty, and when any difficulty arises, he of all men is most likely to get out of it with ease.

And yet if we take light for safety and security, for defence and protection, an upright man in the worst of times may, above all others, promise these things to himself; he that walketh uprightly walketh surely. And indeed this seems to be what is principally intended by the Psalmist. The light here said to *arise to the upright in darkness*, chiefly respects his security from danger in times of great calamity, as appears from what follows: *He shall not be moved forever; he shall not be afraid of evil tidings, his heart shall not shrink, till he sees his desire upon his enemies.* And this security in times of danger the upright man may expect, because uprightness does in its own nature conduce thereto, and is what also intitles him to God's more particular protection. *As by wickedness a city is overthrown, so by the blessing of the upright, it is exalted.* Every upright man is really a benefactor to the public. And if any one can in reason hope to escape the violence and iniquity of bad times, the man of honesty and integrity, he who is upright in all his ways, is the most likely to succeed therein; because he of all others takes the surest method to preserve himself; he is least obnoxious to the malice, envy, or rapine of open enemies, or pretended friends. So that uprightness and integrity is a shield and protection.

The upright man conducts himself in life with so much prudence, as to avoid those rocks, on which others split and are ruined. The destruction of men, even in the worst of times, is generally to be imputed to themselves; either to the care-

less neglect of their own affairs, the lavishness and intemperance of their tongues, or to a busy intermeddling with the concerns of others. Such things as these commonly bring misfortunes on men, and are the foundation of all those straits and difficulties with which they are entangled, even in times of the greatest calamity. But the upright man in a great measure is free therefrom, because his principles oblige him to act directly opposite. His ways are so universally approved, that none will offer him an injury, lest it tends to their own detriment. As he endeavours to oblige all men, and by his conduct to make every one his friend, and none his enemies; so when any difficult circumstances attend him, he will easily find those who are ready to help and assist him. His conversation is so unexceptionable, his management of affairs so prudent, that those who do not love him, will not easily find an occasion to do him injury. Such as have no acquaintance with him, yet having a good esteem for honesty and uprightness in general, will be ready to afford him what assistance they can; from a natural sense, that a good man should be protected, because his case and circumstances may one day be their own. Even those who have lost all sense of good and evil, yet in order to preserve their credit and interest with mankind, will think themselves obliged not to oppress an upright man.

But how ineffectual soever all human means may prove, to secure and preserve an upright man in evil times, yet he has still an anchor more firm and stable to rely on, and which will not fail him; and that is the protection of God, and the care of his particular providence. Men may plot and design, order and contrive as they please, but still God governs the world; and either blasts their most fair and hopeful projects, or if he suffers them to succeed, turns them to what use and purpose he thinks best. And if God rules and disposes all things, *as that not a sparrow falls to the ground without his will*, in a more especial manner doth he engage himself to take care of those who walk uprightly before him. He hath promised to make *their righteousness as clear as the light, and their just dealing as the noon day*: that they shall not be confounded in perilous times, and in the days of death they shall have enough. Though they

they fall they shall not be cast down, for the Lord upholdeth them with his hand : that he will be their strength in the time of trouble ; he will stand by and save them from the ungodly, because they put their trust in him. It would be endless to produce the many passages in scripture to this purpose ; I shall therefore only add that remarkable one, wherein the upright man, and his security in evil times, are described after a very particular manner : *He that walketh righteously and speaketh uprightly ; that despiseth the gain of oppressions ; that shaketh his hands from holding of bribes ; that stoppeth his ears from hearing of blood ; and shutteth his eyes from seeing evil : he shall dwell on high ; his place of defence shall be the munitions of the rocks ; his bread shall be given him, his water shall be sure.* That is, whoever walks uprightly, and makes a conscience of his ways, such a man shall be always under the watchful care and protection of the divine providence. For God will not suffer him to fall into any great distress ; but will afford him such a portion of temporal good things, as to render his life easy and supportable. Experience generally verifies the truth of this ; honest and upright men, in the midst of public calamities, for the most part escaping better than those who are otherwise. Such, in their greatest extremities, when no prospect of deliverance from any human means have appeared, yet, after a most strange, extraordinary, and unexpected manner, have met with succour and relief. And thus attended by the special providence of God, they have never been miserable, however sometimes afflicted, and deprived of an ample fortune.

But it must be acknowledged, that though piety and uprightness have the promise of blessedness in this life, and which is generally made good ; yet there are many instances to the contrary. God, for wise reasons, may suffer an upright man to be oppressed, and perish in a common destruction, without violating such his promises ; which can only be meant to respect ordinary and common events. And even in this case there will *to the upright arise light in darkness* : that is, light in the third sense we have given of the word, as implying peace, joy, and comfort ; according to the Psalmist, *Light is sown for the righteous, and gladness for the upright in heart.* Whatever afflictions

the upright man suffers, he hath this advantage over others, that he can more easily bear them than they, without any great disturbance to himself ; because he enjoys the same calmness and serenity of mind, the same peace, quiet, and contentment, that ever he did. He rather rejoices than repines and grows discontented under his present sufferings ; well knowing they are so ordered by the great Governor of the world, for his good and benefit. This consideration effectually supports him under all difficulties he conflicts with ; that he is not only easy and quiet, but well-pleased with the dispensations of the divine providence towards him, how ungrateful soever to flesh and blood. Let what will happen, he is full of peace and joy, not being disappointed in his designs. His great aim was to please God ; his conscience assures him, from God's word, that he has done it ; and he waits for the happy time, when the secrets of all hearts shall be disclosed, and then doubts not of receiving approbation, and praise, and great reward ; and his life and death will verify the Psalmist's observation, *Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright, for the end of that man is peace.*

SERMON LXVII.

By ARCHBISHOP HORT.

The Christian Life described.

TITUS, ii. 11, 12.

For the grace of God that bringeth salvation, hath appeared to all men ; teaching us, that denying all ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world.

THE grace of God here, and in many other places of scripture, signifies the gospel of our Saviour Jesus Christ, which is the highest manifestation of God's grace and favour that was ever made to mankind. Here only we learn that God *so loved the world, as to give his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him, should not perish, but have everlasting life.* Here only we learn, that God will pardon our sins, and restore us to his favour upon our sincere repentance and amendment. Here only it is, that life and immortality,

things before but obscurely hinted, are brought to light. Here only are to be found the assurances of a resurrection to a life of glory and felicity, which God, who cannot lie, hath promised to all good men. The grace of God in the gospel, bringeth salvation to all men, to every nation and country under heaven, and to every one, who *will deny all ungodliness and worldly lusts, and live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world.* In these words the duty of every good Christian is laid down in natural order. He must begin with denying all ungodliness and worldly lusts; all kind of wickedness, every transgression of God's law: for all who nameth the name of Christ, and would become a good Christian, must depart from iniquity. The essential parts of the Christian life are here distinguished according to their respective objects; with regard to ourselves, it is sobriety; with respect to other men, it is righteousness; and with regard to God, it is godliness.

The virtue of sobriety chiefly consists in the government of our sensual appetites and inclinations, which generally betray us into those irregularities that are contrary to sobriety; *every man is tempted when he is drawn away of his own lusts, and enticed; then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin.* The principal of those sensual appetites, which are apt to draw us into excess, are these following: The appetite for meat and drink, with respect to which sobriety consists in temperance: the appetite for continuing the species, called concupiscence; and here sobriety means chastity: the appetite for riches; and here sobriety signifies contentment.

The appetite for meat and drink was implanted in our nature, to excite us to take that nourishment which is necessary to preserve health and life. But the misfortune is, that these good things, which were designed to give us innocent pleasure, are, through the corruption of our nature, abused, and made the occasions of gluttony, drunkenness, and all kind of intemperance, to God's dishonour, and the reproach of our natures. This being the corrupt state of the world in St. Paul's time, he labours every where to prove that Christianity is a religion that requires great purity of life and manners, and that Christians must become new creatures,

putting off the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, and putting on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness; not living after the flesh, but, through the spirit, mortifying the deeds of the body. So that Christians must not give way to the cravings of their sensual appetites, but must govern and restrain them within the strict rules of sobriety and temperance. We must take heed lest our hearts be overcharged with surfeiting and drunkenness, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof; but constantly imitate the strict virtue and sobriety of our blessed Saviour. It is difficult, I confess, to fix the limits of eating and drinking, because of the different constitutions of people; every one must therefore judge for himself, and by experience discover the bounds of temperance. But in general we must beware of approaching too near to vice, for fear of our own treacherous hearts, and the force of temptation. Sobriety, with respect to eating and drinking, lies within a small compass. St. Paul thus describes gluttons, that *their god is their belly.* The same he said of those who place their chief happiness in eating and drinking, who gratify a wanton palate at any price, even to the impairing their fortunes, the ruin of their families, and the utter neglect of charity.

The vice of drunkenness is more easily distinguished, being written in legible characters, in the eyes, tongue, and feet; besides the loss of reason, and transforming a man into a brute, a wise man into a fool. Indeed, drunkenness is often unpremeditated, and gradually creeps on without being perceived: but this is no excuse, as every one knows the bad consequences, and that it often ends in madness. For the reason once dethroned, and the passions inflamed, they hurry a man into all sorts of wickedness and mischief. There is hardly a glutton or drunkard who does not repent the next day of his debauch; but as such repentance is only the effect of excess, it soon vanishes without any reformation. But it must at last come to a real repentance; for when the constitution is broken, the powers of nature fail, and death approaches, a man can scarce help repenting; but then it will be too late, because it cannot be proved true by amendment of life. Thus the voluptuous man in the gospel, *went clothed in purple*

purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day, and could spare nothing from his luxury for poor Lazarus who lay perishing at his gate; but when he was in hell, he earnestly begged for a drop of water from the same Lazarus to cool his tongue. Let Christians who indulge their appetite in drunkenness and gluttony, from hence learn to prevent a late repentance, by restraining their sensual inclinations; and to deny all ungodliness and worldly lusts, and live soberly in the present world, for these of all vices are most contrary to Christian sobriety. I proceed to consider

The appetite of concupiscence, or that of continuing the race of mankind in the world. Sobriety with regard to this is chastity. Were men left at large as to this appetite, many mischiefs and inconveniencies would ensue. The alliances of families and ties of blood must cease. Inheritance and property would be confounded. The endearments peculiar to conjugal affection, and the mutual fidelity between husband and wife, would be lost. The education of children would be neglected; for children would not know their own fathers, nor fathers their children, so that all parental and filial affection would be at an end. In short, the race of mankind would be so disunited and blended, that the world must soon run into infinite confusions and disorders. For these reasons God hath wisely restrained this appetite, and ordained the holy state of matrimony, that the human race should be perpetuated this way, and all other offsprings be esteemed spurious and dishonourable. The Christian religion forbids all impure commerce under the highest penalties: *Neither fornicators nor adulterers shall inherit the kingdom of God; and whoremongers and adulterers God will judge.* No corrupt communication must proceed out of our mouths, nor foolish talking and jesting, because these are apt to inflame unlawful desires. And *whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her, hath committed adultery with her already in his heart.* These are the restraints which the gospel has laid upon this unruly appetite, and are refinements of purity and chastity, which escaped the best of the heathen moralists, being reserved for the religion of Christ.

As to the appetite for riches, with regard to which sobriety means content-

ment; this is a false appetite of man's making, and not implanted in us by God. The desire of whatever is necessary for the support and comfort of life is natural and reasonable, and may lawfully be gratified by all honest means. And though this appetite for money may not at first seem contrary to the sobriety here recommended, (for covetous men are most remarkable for their sobriety and temperance, and the reason is plain, because their sensual appetites cannot be indulged without great expence,) yet it is not virtue that makes covetous men abstemious, but to save their money; this being their prevailing taste, they will deny themselves even the necessities of life to gratify it. But as little as covetousness may in appearance be contrary to sobriety, yet in truth it is inconsistent with it, because it is a stranger to contentment, and never thinks it has enough, but is always craving more; and even old age, which abates other appetites, does but encrease this. And though it be free from drunkenness, gluttony, and other pleasurable vices, yet it is attended with a different guilt, more injurious to men; such as oppression, exaction, cheating, want of charity to the poor, of beneficence to mankind, and of a contented spirit, the natural companions of avarice, and therefore ranked among the blackest vices in scripture. A covetous man the Lord abhors. No covetous man, who is an idolater, hath any inheritance in the kingdom of God; and which is the only inheritance he never coveted. *They that will be rich fall into temptation, and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men into destruction and perdition; for the love of money is the root of all evil.*

Under the appetite of riches, I cannot omit the love of gaming. I mean not that profligate sort, which is made a profession, but that more reputable kind, which obtains a sanction from persons who are otherwise to be justly esteemed and imitated. The most innocent recreations may become faulty, if they take up that time which ought to be more profitably employed, or betray us into unreasonable hours, to the neglect of our families and devotions; or if they so possess our hearts, that we are miserable when a party disappoints us, and think it an evening lost, if it be not devoted to play. These are violent

lent symptoms that the love of money is the prevailing ingredient; and that recreation is not the only thing in view. Indeed the love of money, when it is inordinate, and engrosses our affections, time and pursuits, to the neglect of our duty to God, our neighbour, or families, cannot be reconciled with the sobriety of true Christians.

The next division of our Christian duty, is to live righteously in this present world: a duty which extends to all our dealings with men. For righteousness requires us to be fair and equal in all our contracts and agreements; taking no advantage of the ignorance, weakness, or necessities of our neighbour; but to be punctual in performing our obligations, fulfilling the mutual intention, and appealing to our consciences as witnesses for us. It requires us to render to all their dues, not only debts in law, but in equity and good conscience; and to do this cheerfully, without compulsion, readily without delay, or having recourse to evasions, which is a real injustice; for there is no honesty in paying debts when it cannot be helped. And yet, to the great shame of our country, too much of this injustice is found among us. For when we see luxury in dress, furniture, equipage, and splendid tables, supplied by poor tradesmen, who are unmercifully kept out of their money, till they are ruined and undone by supporting the vanity of those who despise them; what is this but the greatest injustice?—We should also avoid contracting debts beyond what we are able to pay; for this is to run the risque of being dishonest; and to abuse the confidence which others repose in us.

Another branch of righteousness relates to the good name and credit of our neighbour. There is a great tenderness due to the good name of every one. If a man in business be slandered, it may deprive him and his family of their bread, for the mischief is soon done; and when once slander is out, it runs and spreads apace, and is hard to be recalled. And, as we should not injure him in his good name, so neither in his life, health, and limbs, for these are still more precious to him; and no kind of injustice is so cruel, as what tends to destroy or hurt these, for which no reparation can be made.—This leads me to speak of duelling; a practice not to be reconciled with the prin-

ciples of Christianity, nor even with moral virtue or common sense: for what can be more contrary to righteousness, than for a private man to be judge and executioner in his own cause? not a cool and indifferent, but a passionate and exasperated judge, and where the sentence is no less than death. And though the vindication of honour is pretended, yet, I fear, it often proceeds from revenge and thirst of blood. And all persons of virtue and religion will condemn the cruelty and injustice of that man, who attempts the life of his neighbour for a rude word, or a hasty stroke; and will call it a savage and inhuman principle, contrary to justice, goodness, charity, and every amiable quality of human nature. And I could wish that our men of gallantry would consider these things, and weigh the folly and danger of giving or accepting a challenge, which may end in immediate death, or the loss of health and limbs, to one, if not to both. The survivor, however he may palliate his crime, is no better than a murderer. Juries may call it manslaughter; but at the grand assize, before the great Judge, no such distinction will be allowed. He may indeed live to repent; but how can any wilful murderer obtain mercy, when it is out of his power to make any reparation? But what becomes of the wretch that falls? His case is truly deplorable; for he dies in the very act of wickedness, when repentance is impossible.

Almsgiving is another branch of Christian righteousness, as a debt to Almighty God. He gave us our being, and has indefeasible right in all that belongs to us; we are therefore no better than his stewards; we hold our wealth subject to his orders, and every fit object of charity that providence puts in our way, is entitled to our benevolence. Indeed the object nor quantity of our charity is no where prescribed. These are left to every man's prudence and conscience; only let every man *give not grudgingly or of necessity, for God loveth a cheerful giver. He that soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly, and he that soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully.*

The chief branches of righteousness then, with regard to our neighbour, are, to pay to every man what we owe him in justice and equity cheerfully and without compulsion. To be tender of his credit and

and good name; avoiding all slander that may hurt his reputation; and to defend and justify him, as far as truth will permit. To restrain our passions, from committing acts of violence upon his person; to protect his health, life, or limbs, as far as consists with prudence and our own safety. To relieve his wants by our alms, according to our abilities; and we have a rule to assist us in all cases; *for whatsoever we would that men should do unto us, let us even so do unto them, for this is the law and the prophets.* By consulting our own conscience, this oracle will always teach us how to be righteous in all cases.

I proceed to consider another most important article of Christian duty, which is, to live godly. In general to live godly, is to have that habitual sense of the being and attributes of God impressed upon our minds, as may upon all occasions duly influence, not only our outward behaviour, but our very thoughts and designs, so as to be the governing principle of our whole lives. A good man is one who *sets the Lord always before his eyes*; who accustoms himself to meditate upon God, and by frequent contemplation of his infinite perfections, imprints upon his spirits an habitual regard and veneration for him. And an irreligious man is one who *lives without God in the world; and has not God in all his thoughts.* But more particularly,

To live a godly life, implies a grateful sense of the many blessings we have received from God; who gave us our beings, who so exquisitely contrived our bodies, and put into them immortal spirits, endued with the noble powers of free-will, understanding, and memory, which render us intellectual and moral agents, capable of those rational pleasures and enjoyments that all other animals are destitute of; who is our daily benefactor, supplying us with food and raiment; and innumerable delights and satisfactions to gratify our senses, and enliven our spirits: and above all, who mercifully sent his only Son to save us from endless misery, and to entitle us, upon easy conditions, to new hopes of his favour and of eternal happiness.

A constant dependance and reliance of mind upon God, is another part of living godly. The experience of God's goodness naturally creates our dependance on

it for the future. The scriptures exhort us to this duty: *Cast thy burden upon the Lord, and he shall sustain thee. Blessed are all they that put their trust in thee.* Not but God expects that we should use all the means in our power to obtain our wants, and then to hope and pray for his assistance and blessing. This duty consists in a settled habit of mind, that will run through the whole course of a godly life. It will operate on the rich as well as the poor man; the former is not less dependent on the providence of God than the latter. If God should withdraw his warm sunshine, or his kindly showers and dews, what would become of the produce of his land? Soon would *the heaven over him be as brass, and the earth under him as iron.* Hence the rich should learn to have an humble dependance on God for the support and comfort of their lives, and not think themselves all-sufficient; and the poor not to despond, but to rely on the blessing of God's providence upon their honest labours and industry. And both are taught in the Lord's prayer, to ask their daily bread from their common Father which is in heaven. Again,

To make the glory of God one great end of our actions, is essential to the living godly. To promote his honour, to propagate the true religion and worship of God in the world; to engage men in the love of virtue, truth, and goodness; to reprove all kinds of vice and immorality, all disrespect and contempt of God, all false and idolatrous worship; to use his holy name with the greatest reverence, and reprove those who use it profanely; to do all this to the utmost of our power and influence, is to make the glory of God the great end of our lives; for *whether we eat or drink, or whatever we do, we must do all to the glory of God.* But to live godly also implies our having a continual sense of God's infinite presence on our minds, by which he perfectly knows all our actions, thoughts, and desires. *His eyes are upon man, and sees all his goings. I the Lord search the heart and try the reins; and give to every man according to his ways, and to the fruit of his doings.* The consideration of God's infinite knowledge should produce in us an habitual awe and fear of the divine majesty, which will influence us to an uniform course of virtue and obedience.

This

This single reflection, if duly attended to, will deter us from all wickedness, excite us to the practice of all righteousness, even to the denial of our most favourite inclinations. Fear is a passion of the strongest operation; it was the first passion that awakened Adam after his transgression; he was afraid, and then hid himself. When Joseph's virtue began to stagger, his last refuge was in the fear of God: *How can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?* It was this that saved his virtue. *Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man.* Did we always remember that God is ever present with us, sees what we are doing, and whose eye we can never escape; who would dare to do a wicked action, or neglect a good one? Who would not but lead a godly and religious life?

A submissive and patient resignation to God's will, under all troubles and afflictions, is also a material part of godliness. The great governor of the world has many wise and good reasons for afflicting even good men, which we cannot discover; and therefore in all the divine dispensations we must say with Eli, *Let him do what seemeth him good*; and with Job, *the Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away, blessed be the name of the Lord.* *For God does not willingly afflict, nor grieve the children of men*; but has wise and gracious ends of providence to answer, though we are ignorant of them. The frequent reading of God's holy word has likewise a great tendency to a good life. *All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.* A good man's delight is in the law of the Lord, and he doth meditate therein day and night. There is nothing necessary to be known, believed, or practised, which is not clearly revealed in these sacred volumes. To neglect therefore to read this book of God, shews a certain want of that godliness, which is the great character of a Christian. Again,

A due regard to God consists in the constant performance of divine worship, both in private and in public. The worship of God appears so evident by the light of nature, that all nations have

agreed in the practice of it. As God is our creator, preserver, and redeemer, this makes it our indispensable duty to worship and pray to him. The Psalmist thus directs us: *O come let us worship and fall down, let us kneel before the Lord our maker; for he is our God.* And our Saviour says, *thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve.* And St. Paul bids us *be careful for nothing*, (so as to be over anxious, or distrust providence,) *but in every thing, by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your request be made known unto God.* Prayer is both an act of religion, by which God is honoured, and is also a proper means of supplying our necessities: for to praise him for his glorious excellencies; to thank him for his great benefits; to confess our sins and implore his mercy and forgiveness; to make our humble supplications to him for the supply of all our wants; this is truly and properly the business of prayer.

But then we are to prefer public worship to private, because in the nature of the thing, it tends more to promote the honour of God, as it is performed in the presence of many witnesses, and with greater solemnity. There is a peculiar force, solemnity, and beauty in public worship, which is not to be found in what is private and secret. This is *worshipping God in the beauty of holiness, and giving him the glory due unto his name.* But I must not omit another part of devotion, that of family worship. And the same arguments that establish public worship may be urged for this, because every family is a little church or congregation of Christians; and the minister of this church is the father or ruler of the family, whose right and authority is founded on the law of nature. By virtue of this trust, every master of a family is answerable to God for the performance of divine worship within his little jurisdiction. Thus Joshua resolved, *as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.* The regular discharge of this duty will be attended with great advantages. It is the surest way to procure God's favour and protection, and to bring down his blessings upon all our undertakings. It will naturally beget in our children and servants, a reverence for God, and things sacred; it will season their minds

with

with religion, lead them into habits of virtue, sobriety, and honesty, by the frequent thoughts of God and another world, which otherwise they would seldom think of. And this duty, with regard to the world, will procure credit, esteem, and honour: for they who do not love religion themselves, will yet respect those who do. This constant regard to God in family worship, is a necessary branch of godly living, and will be found in every family, where the master has a true sense of religion upon his heart.

The great motive offered by St. Paul to enforce this duty is the *looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearance of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ; who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify to himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works.* Here we plainly see, that the design of our Saviour's death was not merely to save us from the punishment of our sins, without repentance and reformation; but to prepare us for the heavenly happiness, by the practice of all those excellent virtues he has taught us by the the gospel and his own example, and by which his followers are to be distinguished from the professors of all other religions. Christians so qualified by sanctity of life and purity of heart; who deny all ungodliness and worldly lusts, and live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world; may justly look for that blessed hope and glorious appearance of the great God, and our Saviour Jesus Christ. And a blessed hope this is; as its object is the highest happiness our nature can possibly enjoy, *such as eye hath not seen, nor hath it entered into the heart of man to conceive.* It is also a blessed hope, in regard to the certainty of attaining it, because it is founded on the promise of God, who cannot lie; which *hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast.*

And supposing it should cost us some trouble and pains to govern our passions and sensual appetites; to live soberly, temperately, and chastely; and that by paying our just debts, and doing acts of charity, we should take somewhat from our luxury, equipage, and the pride of life; nay that by being strictly honest and just, we should leave ourselves a smaller income; for this is to practise righteousness: or, that we should conquer our idleness and aversion to devotion, and oblige

ourselves to be constant in our public and private worship of God, without which we cannot live godly; I say, supposing that all this will require some pains and trouble, yet shall we not be great gainers in the end? and will not the blessed hope that is set before us abundantly make amends for all this? If men will rise early and set up late, deny their sleep, their food and recreations, in pursuit of worldly advantages, and think themselves well paid if they do but succeed; and yet will take no pains to please and serve God, to deny their lusts, to live up to the rules of the gospel, and the holy religion they profess, and reject this blessed hope; what can be said, but that their eternal ruin is their own choice, and they run into it with their eyes open?

S E R M O N LXVIII.

By BISHOP MOORE.

Of Religious Melancholy.

PSALM xlii. 5.

Why art thou cast down, O my soul? Why art thou disquieted within me?

MANY good Christians of timorous and melancholy constitutions, feeling no present comfort from their strict fasts, their earnest and often repeated prayers, are apt to think, that what they perform in the service of God, is so mean and imperfect, as neither to please him, nor profit their own souls. It may therefore be proper to consider the case of these melancholy persons, who, though they are in a safe condition, yet greatly need to have their minds quieted and composed. Manifold are the scruples and fears which disturb them. Some suppose the reformation of their lives hath not proceeded from a sincere love to God, and desire to please him; but from a mere dread of those punishments which he hath threatened. Others finding a flatness on their minds, and want of zeal in religious duty; this makes them fear that what they do is not fit to be presented unto God, and that he will not accept it; which so dejects them, as even to tempt them to lay aside their devotions. And there are others, who have such wicked blasphemous thoughts start up in their minds, while

while exercised in the worship of God, that they think themselves guilty of the sin against the Holy Ghost, pronounce their condition remediless, and that God hath utterly rejected them.

As to the first, I answer; that no doubt love is a more noble principle of action than fear; and therefore that religious service which arises from love, is more perfect, angelical, and grateful to God: but still he will not disregard such service and obedience as proceeds from fear. Those who have forsaken their evil ways, lest they should lead them to the pit of hell, it may be hoped, will find a place in the glorious kingdom of heaven. For hell was made to terrify daring sinners, to reduce and confine them within the bounds of their duty; as will, I hope, appear from the following considerations:

Fear is one of the passions God has planted in our souls as well as love; they are both implanted in us for some wise ends. When therefore the passion of fear serves the end for which God grafted it in our minds, no doubt he will approve the good effect it produces. The end for which God placed fear in our nature, was chiefly to beget in us an awful regard of his most glorious majesty; to make us dread violating his laws, and acting contrary to his righteous will; and when we go astray, to excite us to return to him by repentance. So that when fear prevails on a man to amend his bad life, he puts this passion to the very use which God intended. And whoever thus applies it, has no reason to doubt but God will graciously accept his obedience. We may also observe, that God hath enforced all his laws by threatenings as well as promises; the one to work on our love, the other to excite our fears; God having made the motives to our obedience to answer the different passions of our souls. Wherefore there is not the least reason to conceive that God should threaten punishments against the disobedient, which naturally actuates the fears of men, and yet not be pleased with the service which these fears produce in us. God sets life and death before men, that the fear of death may make them chuse life; and he threatens everlasting punishments, that the amazements and horror thereof, may powerfully engage them, with all care and speed, to labour, and

fit themselves to partake of the divine mercies.

Our blessed Saviour and his disciples in their sermons, address themselves not only to the passions of love, but also to that of fear; which they would not have done, but that the sacrifices of fear will ascend up to heaven with a grateful savour. *He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.* Christ here intends to bring men to a belief of his gospel, and the obedience of his laws, as well by the fears of damnation as the hopes of salvation. When he bids the man whom he had cured, to *sin no more, lest a worse thing come unto him*; the argument our Lord used to engage him to live innocently, was directed to the passion of his fear, taken from the danger of a calamity that would befall him, greater than that of which he was cured, did he still continue in his sins. *And, saith St. Paul, knowing the terrors of the Lord, we persuade men.* The greatness of these terrors, was, *that we must all appear before the judgment-seat of Christ, that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or evil*; which the Apostle knew, if maturely weighed, would be of irresistible force to recover men from a lewd and profane conversation; since they must be extremely obstinate and desperate, on whom an argument of such wonderful power and efficacy can make no impression.

I proceed to consider the case of those serious Christians, who complain of coldness in their devotions, and towards holy things. Such think they do not address God in prayers with such an appetite as they could wish, being destitute of earnest and fervent desires for the success of their petitions to heaven; they suppose in themselves a great indifferency to spiritual exercises, which they apprehend is a proof of their hypocrisy, and that God will refuse their prayers and thanksgivings as vain insincere oblations. And here it ought to be observed, that the reason why many have not more zeal and life in God's service, proceeds from themselves, and their own negligence and want of consideration. They perhaps appear in the congregation, but mind not what they are about. They consider not of what importance it is for them to serve God in the most acceptable manner. No wonder therefore

therefore that their minds should be flat and inactive, or little concerned for the prosperous issue of their prayers. As then it is high presumption for such careless persons to hope for any benefit, by that part they bear in the public worship; so they may cure their malady, by retiring from their business and pleasure, and reflecting in good earnest on the great danger to which they expose their immortal souls. But as for those who frequently endeavour to remove this coldness from their souls when they approach the heavenly throne, and yet fail in their attempt, let me desire them duly to weigh the following observations:

That the different degrees of affections, with which men serve God, often depend on their different tempers and constitutions. Some constitutions are so heavy, as that it is difficult to work on their hopes or fears; to make them sensible either of their gain or loss. But others have such a tenderness of nature, and quickness of sense, that the least thing will much affect them. A little prosperity makes their spirits overflow with joy; and as small a cross sinks and dejects them. Persons then of such various dispositions, though they equally endeavour to prepare themselves, cannot serve God with equal affections; but yet he may be pleased with them alike, because he measures their obedience by the sincerity of their minds, which is in their power; and not by the difference of constitutions, which were not made by themselves. The constitutions of some men being much warmer than others, they sooner take fire, whether they are paying homage to God, or doing business among men. If therefore men have more heat in their natural temper, it is no wonder they should have more zeal in their devotions. But God will not reject any man, because he is of a cold complexion; or disdain his reasonable sacrifice for being offered with less vehemence of passion. Besides, they who render worship to God upon rational motives, void of passion, seem to act upon a higher and more sublime principle; for though they are destitute of that pleasing warmth in their passions, which provokes others to pray and be thankful unto God; yet they cease not to celebrate his praises, because reason suggests, that it is their duty to make grateful acknowledgments of his infinite mercies. Again,

It may be also observed, that the most zealous are not always the best men. Their zeal may be without knowledge, or on the wrong side, as was St. Paul's, when he persecuted the church. And all zeal without charity will profit nothing. Indeed, where a man is zealously affected in a good matter, he may be a glorious instrument to propagate and promote the fear and honour of God; and enjoy a more sensible pleasure in every religious performance. But as all cannot raise their affections to this pitch, God will not quench the smoking flax, nor break the bruised reed; but he will pardon the wanderings, pity the weaknesses, quicken the affections, and make gracious allowances for all the defects of infirm but honest Christians. It should be farther considered, that the most religious cannot maintain an equal warmth in their devotions at all times; even such we find by experience, that in some seasons an unaccountable heaviness will seize on them while on their bended knees supplicating the forgiveness of their sins. If therefore we sometimes perceive our minds to be dull and heavy at our prayers, it is no more than what happens to the most sincere Christians, let them use ever so much care and diligence; so that this should be no just cause of disquiet and dejection of spirit. Besides, sickness and affliction will so disorder the passions and oppress the spirits even of the best of men, that they cannot serve God with as much cheerfulness under calamities and troubles, as at other times.

Though it cannot be expected, that those innocent persons, whose case I am considering, should meet with a complete cure of their grief, yet let me assure them, that nothing will more enliven their spirits in the service of God, than deliberate meditations on him, and themselves, before they enter on any part of divine worship. Would they often engage their minds in contemplations about the divine attributes, and infinite perfections of God's nature; it would greatly tend to remove that drowsy stupidity, which hath so strong an influence on their actions. For frequent thoughts of almighty power will make the most sturdy temper to tremble, and the proudest heart to submit. Can any seriously think of unsearchable wisdom, without admiration, and an earnest desire to be ruled by it? And will not the

the meditations of infinite love, diffusing itself over the world, oblige us to adore, honour, love, and praise that most glorious spring, from whence it flows? Consider how the providence of God extends to the whole creation; how it preserves and delivers us from many and great dangers. This will cause us to break forth into songs and hymns of thanksgiving. And if we proceed to contemplate the deep mysteries, the inconceivable love shewn by Christ in the mighty work of our salvation; to consider his great condescension, in leaving the heavenly regions to dwell among us; his wonderful humiliation, in taking on him our frail, mortal nature; the pains, agonies, and most dreadful death he suffered, to save us ungrateful sinners; this cannot fail to dissolve the most obdurate heart, and make us firmly conclude, that we can never sufficiently admire, love, serve, or suffer too much for this most blessed Saviour.

Can all your passions continue quiet, when you thus view your most merciful Redeemer, who left his Father's bosom to seek and save you, when lost in the ways of sin, in the paths leading to death! who came to procure reconciliation for you with God, whom as you had heinously provoked, so you could give no satisfaction to his injured justice. Recollect with seriousness how often God hath spared you, when your hearts told you that you deserved punishment; how often you have highly offended him, and fearfully expected he would destroy you; yet you still live as a monument of his compassion, and he waits for your return, to be gracious unto you. Do but meditate on these mercies of our God, and try if your hearts will not melt into love and affection. Surely we cannot but fall down before the Lord, with the deepest reverence, and esteem him above all things, who hath created us after his own image; redeemed us with his Son's blood; daily assists us with the graces of his Holy Spirit; and hath provided for us *a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens*. Let such subjects as these entertain your thoughts, before you begin any religious duty; and it will mightily conduce to fill your souls with light and life, and make you diligently study to obtain God's favour, and excite passionate desires to live in his presence to all eternity.

Lastly, as to those unhappy persons

who have wicked and sometimes blasphemous thoughts start in their minds, while they are exercised in the worship of God, which makes them think their case is desperate, and that God hath rejected them; to give such all possible ease and relief, I will endeavour to shew, that their case is not so dangerous as they apprehend; and also offer proper advice for their behaviour under these tumultuous disorders of mind.

And that their case is not so dangerous as they apprehend, will appear from these following considerations: because these frightful thoughts do generally proceed from the disorder and indisposition of the body; perhaps after a fit of sickness, a great disappointment, or heavy loss. And they are most commonly good people who are exercised with them. For bad men, who are busily employed in contriving wickedness; how to gratify their malice, execute their revenge, overreach their neighbours, or satisfy their lusts, seldom complain of these kind of thoughts. But they are honest, well-meaning Christians, of unhealthy constitutions and melancholy tempers, who are so miserably harassed with them. Nor is it in the power of such disconsolate Christians as are tormented with these sad thoughts, with all their endeavours to stifle and suppress them. Nay, often the more they struggle with them, the more they encrease; and when vehemently opposed, the more do they domineer and terrify men. The reason is, because, by unsuccessful strivings, they feed this melancholy humour, and grow more dejected. So that there is good cause, as I before observed, to impute this to bodily distempers rather than to faults of the mind. Indeed, they who labour under such complaints are seldom betrayed into any great and deliberate sins. For they being jealous of the least temptations, tremble at the appearance of any notorious evil. Hence it is, that the sins which most easily captivate others, can scarce enter into them. They have little temptations to covetousness who can find no satisfaction in riches. They cannot be hard-hearted to their neighbours in distress, who are so ready to beg the prayers and help of all about them. They are in no danger of being swelled with pride, who think worse of their own state than it deserves. So that it plainly appears there is more trouble

trouble than danger in the case of such dejected Christians. And though the sentence they pronounce against themselves is so black and dismal, yet, no doubt but God, in his own season, will in some measure quiet their minds, and bestow a large recompense on them, for all the troubles and sorrows they have sustained out of fear that he was highly displeased with them.

The best advice I can give for their behaviour under these perplexing disorders of mind, is, for them frequently to observe how their thoughts are employed. If they are engaged in good matter, encourage and secure them all that is possible, from outward disturbance and diversions. If taken up in trifling vain subjects, of no real benefit, translate them to something more noble and useful. For as our thoughts are, so will be our actions; we cannot think foolishly and act wisely. There is a short and easy passage from idle thoughts to bad ones. But if they are exercised in any bad or evil design, we must extinguish and suppress them. This we must do with all our might, because it is of absolute necessity to the health, peace, and innocence of our souls; and by such frequent reviews of our thoughts, we shall gain power and skill to manage them wisely, and in good measure prevent, if not cure, the trouble complained of by these melancholy persons. They should also endeavour to keep their passions within due bounds. To bring themselves to an equal steady temper, that the affairs of this world may not sour and ruffle their minds. To be mild and gentle in their behaviour; to avoid all needless heats and contentions; to be ready to do every one some good. Not to set their hopes or fears too high; not groundlessly to despair, where God has pronounced no threats; nor fondly to presume, where he has made no promises. Let not such set their hearts too much on the world, nor suffer their passions to run out vehemently after it; nor yet forsake their employment by reason of the trouble of their minds. For no business at all, is as bad as too much; and there is always more melancholy to be found in a cloister than in a market-place. When a man is too full of business, he is apt to forget God; and when he is idle, his head will be a cage of unruly unclean thoughts. Therefore let us not hide our-

selves from our friends, nor quit our calling; because people of dejected tempers never fare worse than when they are alone, and have nothing to do: for not having company or secular affairs to employ them, they will be perpetually musing on themselves; their thoughts will all fix and center on the desperate condition wherein their disturbed fancy hath placed them. Whereas virtuous and cheerful conversation, innocent recreations, and moderate business, will divert the distemper, and chase away these gloomy apprehensions.

When you find these thoughts creeping on you, be not dismayed, as if they were certain tokens of your reprobation: for so far as they depend on bodily indisposition, which they chiefly do, I take them to be no more marks of the divine displeasure, than sickness, losses, or any other temporal calamity. Neither violently struggle with them, since experience teaches, that they encrease by vehement opposition; but when neglected, they will dissipate and waste away.

And let not such think the worse of God, nor accuse his providence of not caring for them, for he sends these afflictions for wise and kind reasons: perhaps as powerful preservatives against heinous sins; or that they may lessen our inclinations to the enjoyments of life, abate our appetites to sensual pleasures, and wean our hearts from the perishing goods of this world. Nothing will dispose us more to have compassion on our suffering brethren, than our own sorrows; or make us less envy the prosperity of others, or more to feel our own infirmities, and need of divine assistance, than our present disconsolation and trouble. Let not these afflicting thoughts discourage our devotions, nor tempt the most melancholy to omit or negligently discharge any Christian office or duty. We must persevere in the ways and acts of religion, notwithstanding such performances seem flat and heavy. Let our prayers continually ascend to heaven, though at present we find no answer or return to them. Prayer is the natural and only safe refuge for the afflicted; a sure stay to the heart when nothing besides can support it. Prayer refines the thoughts, and exalts the soul above its natural pitch; so that he who enters on his prayers with some coldness, shall often, before he ends

them, receive wonderful joy in his mind. Nothing makes the soul so much partake of the divine nature as devout prayer.

At these disconsolate seasons, let the matter of our prayers be such as implies our reposing an extraordinary trust and confidence in God, though he seems to hide his face from us; this will be most acceptable to him, and a strong proof of our integrity not to omit our duty, even when we find little pleasure therein. Let our prayers be frequent rather than long; such as may cause delight and not prove tedious; for it is not the multitude of words, but an honest disposition of heart, which will incline God to hear us. Let such be careful not to forsake the Lord's table, though they there find no comfort; for that heavenly bread will refresh their souls, encrease their graces, and replenish their hearts with joy, as soon as God finds them qualified for so great mercies.

What evil thoughts then soever are injected into our minds, so long as we persist in a religious course of life, there can be no doubt but God will love and approve our services. For he hath promised, that those who are not weary in well-doing, shall in due season reap everlasting life. And should these perplexing thoughts last as long as we live, which is the worst can be supposed; yet this would be no more an argument of God's displeasure, than a fever or fire, the loss of a friend, or any other affliction. Let not therefore our present trials and humiliations make us despair of finding favour with a God of boundless mercy and most tender compassion. We must persevere in our duty, confide in his infinite goodness, and in time the clouds, which now darken our mind, will vanish, and be succeeded by cheerful light; our fears shall be turned into full assurances of unconceivable happiness; and all the disorders, tumults, and confusions in our souls, shall be changed into eternal peace, undisturbed and endless joys. *Fear the Lord and praise him, for he hath not despised nor abhorred the affliction of the afflicted; neither hath he hid his face from him, but when he cried unto him, he heard him. Wait on the Lord, be of good courage, and he shall strengthen thy heart. I will be glad and rejoice in thy mercy, for thou hast considered my trouble; thou hast known my soul in adversity. I will sing unto the Lord, because he has dealt bountifully with me; yea I will hope conti-*

nually, and praise him more and more. O how great is thy goodness, which thou hast laid up for them that fear thee! O love the Lord, all ye saints; for the Lord preserveth the faithful. They that know thy name will put their trust in thee; for thou hast not forsaken them who seek thee.

S E R M O N LXIX.

By ARCHBISHOP SHARPE.

The Parable of the Prodigal Son.

LUKE, xv. 18, 19.

I will arise and go to my father, and say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son.

IN our Saviour's famous parable of the prodigal son many excellent things are delivered for the instruction, direction, and encouragement of all penitent sinners. We here read of the miserable condition which the prodigal son brought himself into by his evil courses; and which was very great. *How many hired servants, said he, of my father have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger!* and also his resolution to return to his father, which followed thereupon. When he came to himself, that is, considered, he said, *I will arise and go to my father, &c.* Under the first circumstance of the prodigal, I shall represent the true state of sinners and wicked men, and the wretched condition into which such bring themselves. I shall then treat of the method by which sinners are brought to repentance; the first step of which is, a deep and serious consideration of their own state and condition.

I begin with the prodigal's evil courses and misery; and it will be proper to consider the account given of him in this parable, both as to his sin and misery. *A certain man, says our Lord, had two sons, and the younger of them said to his father, father, give me the portion of goods that falleth to me. And he divided unto them his living. And not many days after, the younger son gathered all together, and took his journey into a far country, and there wasted his substance with riotous living. And when he had spent all, there arose a mighty famine in that land; and he began to be in want. And he went to a citizen of that country,* who

who sent him into his fields to feed swine. And he would fain have filled his belly with the husk that the swine did eat, and no man gave unto him. By the father here, is meant God, the great Father and Lord of the world, who, out of his abundance, bestows on mankind their several portions. Not one of his children but has a variety of talents committed to him; which, if carefully managed and improved, he will for ever preserve the love, favour, and kindness of his heavenly Father; and will not fail of living happily here, and arriving at last to a glorious state of immortality. By the two sons is meant, the two different sorts of men in the world. In the character of the eldest son, are represented those men, who, being blessed with a good temper, virtuous inclinations, and careful education, have in a great measure preserved their innocence all their lives; have not wandered from their father's house, nor gone astray in the paths of vice and wickedness; but have served their heavenly Father, without any wilful or habitual transgression of his commandments. In the character of the younger son, who is the prodigal, are represented all those men who abuse the talents committed to them, the benefits, helps, and powers bestowed upon them, to evil purposes; who forsake the guidance and conduct of their heavenly Father, and betake themselves to a course of vice and sensuality; in a word, all who live wickedly, whether Jews or gentiles. These are the prodigals here mentioned, for whose comfort and encouragement to repent this parable was framed by our Saviour. And in the account of the prodigal's evil courses and their consequences, we have a lively description of the state of sinners, the methods and steps by which they proceed in sin, and the wretched condition they are thereby brought into; as will appear by comparing one with the other in the following particulars:

The younger son having got his portion, cares no longer to be in his father's house, thinking his liberty there too much abridged: and in order to be free from the awe and restraint of his father, he goes into a foreign country. And thus it is with sinners: the first step of their miscarriage, is the forsaking their heavenly Father. They think it too severe a discipline to live always under the apprehensions and awe of an invisible Being; and

therefore put the thoughts of God out of their minds, saying with the profane people in Job, *depart from us, for we desire not the knowledge of thy ways.* That is, they depart from God while they do not consider or regard him; while they cease to maintain a constant sense of his justice, goodness, and providence, in their minds; while they lay aside the care of his worship, neglect their prayers and holy exercises, and live as if they did not believe there is an intelligent omnipotent Being, who governs the world, and to whom they are accountable.

The prodigal having got into a distant country, and out of his father's sight, allows himself all the liberties his heart can desire; lives viciously and profusely, and soon spends what his father had given him. Thus also the sinner, when once he throws off the fear of God, and all sense of religion, (which is the best security of men's innocence, and the most effectual curb to keep them from going astray,) he presently runs into all sorts of extravagancy and debauchery; gives the reins to every appetite and passion, and takes his fill of unlawful liberties and gratifications, and by this means misapplies those talents which God hath committed to him. He besots his understanding, depraves and corrupts his will, weakens all his spiritual powers, hardens his conscience, and thereby loses all sense of good and evil; he squanders away his time, renders himself incapable of the benefit and advantages which God gave him to improve in virtue.

The prodigal having thus spent his portion by his profuse way of living, is at last, by reason of the extremity of want, forced to become a servant. And this is the true condition of a sinner. He who lives in the constant gratification of his lusts and appetites, so weakens his higher powers, that in a little time he is reduced to the abject condition of a servant or bondman. They who give themselves to commit sin, are the servants of sin. He that is entangled in a habit of vice and wickedness, is no longer at his own disposal, but his lusts hurry him whithersoever they will. Reason is dethroned, and the brutish part of man reigns and governs. He is not a servant to one lord only, but to many, and all inconsistent with one another, which makes the servitude still more intolerable. Lust commands one thing,

ambition another; covetousness this way, intemperance another; some the man must obey: and yet whichsoever he does, the rest are displeased for not being gratified. Indeed they all conspire to promote the interest of the great enemy of mankind, the devil; whose work a man does when he pursues the gratifications of his appetites. So that he is a slave of the devil, as well as of his own lusts, which certainly is the most miserable bondage in the world. He who *committeth sin is of the devil*; and such persons are *led captive by him at his will and pleasure*. Again,

The prodigal having thus of a free-man made himself a servant, we will next see how wretchedly and basely he is used: and he is put to the meanest and most contemptible employment, even to feed swine, and his diet no better than the husks that were given to the hogs. Just thus are all they treated who give themselves up to a vicious life. God designed men for noble employments; and so long as they preserved their innocence, and remained under their Father's wing, in his fear and obedience, they lived like the children of the Most High. Their work was suitable to their dignity, and becoming such excellent natures as God had given them. Their business was to contemplate God and his works; to exercise their reason about the best and noblest subjects; to sing praises to him who was the author of their being; and to employ all their faculties in the most manly way. To love and do good to all their fellow-creatures, as they had opportunity; to govern their inferior appetites, and keep them constantly in subjection to the higher spirit that was in them. This was the employment that our heavenly Father designed us for; and this, all virtuous persons, all who live up to the dignity of their nature, do still follow. But alas! what a mighty change is there, when a man departs from God, and gives himself up to the service of his lusts! Without a figure, we may truly say, that the keeping of swine with the prodigal is a more honourable employment than that which sinners chuse for themselves. What can be more base or vile than that immortal souls, made for the fruition of God himself, should spend days and years in minding nothing but eating,

sleeping, and playing; or in scraping together heaps of money, which in a little time will prove useless to them; or in wallowing in uncleanness and lust, which generally ends in beggary, shame, or rottenness? or in filling their bodies full of drink, till there be nothing but the shape of a man remaining? And yet these are the principal employments in which vicious men busy themselves. These are the things they live for, and beyond which they have no thought or ambition. *Whatever is in the world is either the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, or the pride of life*. Sensual pleasures, wealth, popular applause and greatness, are the three great idols of the world; and whoever forsakes his God, falls down and worships one or more of them. But are not these pitiful and contemptible deities, for a rational immortal soul to prostrate itself before? Is it not a shameful prostitution of our natures, to make these the great objects of our fears and hopes, of our love and joy, of all the designs and pursuits of our lives? Oh! the blindness and degeneracy of mankind! What mean despicable creatures do we make ourselves, when we forsake the paths of virtue and the commandments of our God? Alas! we cease to be men, and level ourselves with the brutes; we debase ourselves even to hell.

Such is the nature of things, that it is impossible for a vicious man to live happily, let his circumstances be ever so prosperous. The mind of man can never be fully contented with any outward goods, and least of all with those which are enjoyed in a vicious unreasonable manner. Solomon, who made more experiments of this kind than any man besides, found at last that these seeming satisfactions were but vanity and vexation of spirit. All the pleasures which the sinner can receive from the greatest gratification of his sensual appetites, are like those that brute beasts are capable of as well as he; only with this difference, that their enjoyments are not allayed with bitterness, which his are. And can that be the happiness of a man, which animal creatures partake of as much as himself? But so far are our vicious gratifications from being true pleasures, that, take them altogether, they have much more of uneasiness and trouble, than of delight and satisfaction. The covetous, the proud, the revengeful, the envious, the glutton, the drunkard, the whoremonger, the ambitious, all these
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can testify, from sad experience, that the contentment they receive from the gratification of these several passions or appetites, doth no ways countervail the pains and restlessness, the disturbances, disappointments, and manifold evil consequences to their bodies and souls, good names and estates, which they suffer upon account of them.

But to come to the last circumstance of the prodigal's condition, which the parable mentions: As coarse and disagreeable fare as the husks were, yet he would have been glad to have satisfied his hunger even with these; but thus much was denied him. *He would fain fill his belly with the husks which the swine did eat, but no man gave them unto him.* Wretched unhappy man! he, who before pampered himself with all sorts of delicacies, even to surfeiting, would now be glad of any sort of food, even of husks, if he could get them. But so cruel is the master he serves, that he will not suffer him to fill his belly, no not with these. In this instance also, we have a lively representation of the state and condition of the spiritual prodigal. For thus doth the devil treat all those who abandon God and virtue to serve him and their own lusts. The best wages they have is only a little sensual pleasure, or empty honour and greatness, which are but husks in comparison of the noble entertainments of religion and a good conscience. But even these they cannot have their fill of; for, alas! they are obnoxious to a thousand contingencies, which either rob us of them, or put a period to all the delight and comfort we should receive by them; they are in a short time either taken from us, or we from them.

How then can he be said to have his fill of wealth, who is either always craving and drudging for more, or anxiously fearful to lose what he hath? and who, notwithstanding the fulness of his barns, and the largeness of his possessions, and his saying to himself, *soul, eat and drink and be merry, for thou hast goods laid up for many years,* shall hear these words, *thou fool, this night shall thy goods be taken from thee, and then whose will all these things be?* Nor are there any greater hopes for the ambitious, who as easily may command the wind, the ebbings and flowings of the sea, as secure to themselves the uncertain favour of great men, or the more uncertain

breath of the people. And as for bodily pleasures, what do they signify, when the appetites are decayed and perished; when the powers of nature grow feeble and languid? This old age will undoubtedly bring to pass, but most frequently riots and debauches effect it sooner. Besides, what comfort and satisfaction can they afford a sinner under a multitude of other unfortunate afflicting circumstances, to which he is unavoidably exposed? Can he say, I will refresh myself with play, or wine, or music, when he lies languishing on a sick bed? Or will his heaps of treasure charm the gout, stone, or colic, that they shall not torment him? or lastly, can all these things together yield any balm to heal a wounded conscience, which in the midst of the greatest affluence, the most luxurious entertainments, makes the vicious man to tremble and look pale with the bitter reflections of his life past, and the dismal prospect of what is to come? Alas! in such cases, he can purchase no quiet and repose to his mind, from the possession of what the world calls great and happy.

But supposing he could uninterruptedly fill and satisfy his appetites herein, without the disturbance of sickness, afflictions, disappointments, and even of a guilty conscience; yet this misery will still attend him, that he cannot enjoy these things always. The time is coming on apace when he must part with these his friends and comforters; in a little time he must go into the regions of death; and then bid an everlasting farewell to the light of his eyes, the desire of his soul, and the idols of his life. Then he will sadly say with the prodigal, *how many hired servants are there in my father's house that have bread enough, but lo! I perish with hunger.* He calls for his pleasures, but they are all gone as a dream when one awaketh. He calls for his wealth, which with so much anxiety and toil he hath amassed together; but that is upon the wing, to fly to a new heir, who perhaps will spend it more profusely than he got it fordidly; and all his gay feathers in which he prided himself are now plucked from him, and he is left naked and despicable. In this extremity, he sees nothing but what fills him with horror. If he looks inward, there is all hell, despair, and confusion; there he finds a soul polluted with sin, oppressed with intolerable loads of guilt,

and filled with the remembrance of his past folly. If he looks about him, he sees all his friends and companions taking their last leave of him, and as they forsake him, his great master, the devil, with his frightful guard (whose interest he hath faithfully pursued all his life) are ready to seize upon the trembling soul, as it parts from the body. Lastly, if he looks upwards, he sees an angry offended God, whose laws he hath affronted, whose threatenings he hath despised, whose grace he hath turned into wantonness, and whose holy spirit he hath done despite to. He sees the Judge of the world summoning him to appear at his dreadful tribunal, to give an account of the talents he hath misemployed, of the precious time he hath mispent; of the riots and debauches, the frauds and unjust dealings, the oaths and blasphemies, the lewd intrigues, wicked designs, profane words, and evil actions of his whole life: and he seems to hear that terrible sentence sounding in his ears, which will be most certainly pronounced upon him, and all such at the last day, *Go, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels.* Oh! miserable state! the dismal conclusion of a sinful life! these are the natural fruits and consequences of forsaking God, and giving ourselves over to a course of vice and impiety. Nor is there any probability of preventing or averting those consequences, unless, with the prodigal, we do in time come to ourselves, and enter into a serious consideration of our ways, and then arise and go to our Father.

Which leads me to consider the prodigal's return. *I will arise and go to my father.* And here we have a lively representation of the beginning and progress of repentance after a vicious life. The prodigal being pinched with extremity of want, at last comes to weigh and debate things seriously in his own mind. Whilst he was in the height of his prosperity, he minded nothing but the pursuit of his riots and debauches; he seemed to live without thinking or any kind of reflection. But at last his miserable circumstances make him to deliberate, and use his reason. He then considers the happiness he has lost, and the wretched condition to which his folly hath brought him. And this puts him upon serious resolutions to apply to his father. And thus it fares with every spiritual prodigal, who, after

a vicious course of life, at last returns to his duty. The first step of his repentance is a serious sense of his condition; till he begins to think, reflect, and consider, there are no hopes of him; but when Providence, by a fit of sickness, or some sharp affliction, brings him to a sense of his condition, and that he in good earnest lays things to heart, and debates matters seriously with himself; then he gives some hopes that he may, in time, rescue himself from the bondage of his lusts, and the snares of the devil, and become a convert to virtue and piety.

Let then all of us who have gone astray, with the prodigal instantly lay the foundation of repentance, which is serious consideration. And I would to God we would all do it presently. Oh! that we would give ourselves leave to think, and no longer blindly pursue our appetites; that we would at last come to ourselves, as this prodigal did, and resume the exercise of our long abandoned reason; that we would with David, *stand in awe, and commune with our own hearts in our chamber, and be still*; that we would sedately consider what will be the issue and conclusion of our riots and vicious courses! Were we thus wise, did we thus consider, I doubt not but through the grace of God, we should in a very little time feel a mighty change in our minds; and then imitate the prodigal in the second step he made to his repentance; namely, enter into firm purposes and resolutions to quit our lewd courses, and to return to our heavenly Father, from whom we have so long withdrawn ourselves.

To persuade all who are concerned, thus to come to themselves, and to enter into serious considerations about their everlasting interests, is the next thing I shall offer. Let such then consider, that it is this want of thinking, reflecting, and coming to themselves, that hath been the great occasion of all their past sins and follies. But if such will seriously consider their own spiritual affairs, they cannot avoid being brought to true repentance. Serious thinking, if practised and continued, will have the same effects upon others that it had upon the prodigal: it will make them return to their father.

It is the want of thinking and reflecting that is the great occasion of all the miscarriages of our lives: for though our
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natures are bad enough, and our propensity to sin is very great, yet it is not so much that which hurries us into so many sorts of follies and vices as our inconsideration. We will not give ourselves liberty to think and reflect upon the consequences of our actions, before we venture upon them, but blindly rush into them; and hence comes the great degeneracy of human kind; we follow our present inclinations, and attend no further than just what the object before us, or the circumstances we are engaged in, prompt us to: and after we have done a sinful action once or twice, by degrees it becomes familiar to us, and at last our sins grow habitual and customary, and then it is not easy to conquer them. The truth is, want of consideration is the fountain of almost all the miscarriages of mankind. What is it that makes any man an atheist, or to question the being of God and providence, but that he will not give himself leave to think; will not take the pains to view the manifest effects and footsteps which every where, and in every thing, are to be discovered of an infinite power, wisdom, and goodness? The same may be said of those who are infidels and sceptics as to the Christian religion. None is so because he wants evidence of the truth of the gospel, (for there is enough to convince the most curious inquirer,) but because he will not consider. He runs on in a road of worldly business or sensuality, and cannot find time or humour to make a serious and strict inquiry into things of this nature. If a man would but use his reason fairly, and calmly attend to the arguments that may be offered for the convincing him of the being of God, or the truth of Christ's religion, he could almost as soon not be man as an atheist or an unbeliever. And thus as to the particular immoralities of our lives, it would not be possible for any man to live in the practice of common oaths and imprecations, if, when tempted to swear, or damn, he did seriously consider that it is the dreadful name of God he is going to affront, who can damn him in good earnest for the lewd abuse of his tongue.

Again: It is nothing but inconsideration that makes any man follow a course of drunkenness and sensuality; he could hardly be such a brute, if his mind was attentive to the dismal consequences, both as to his business, health, estate, and pos-

terity, as well as his soul, in following such a course of life. It is stupidity and want of thought that ruins us all. We may pretend the unhappiness of our education, the badness of our nature, the force of temptations, the irresistible baits of pleasure or profit, or the bewitching charms of company, in excuse for our careless or vicious lives; but in reality it is our own rashness and inconsideration that ought generally to bear the greatest blame. If we would but seriously and frequently consider the arguments and motives to religion, and meditate upon them, it would be impossible for us to live as we do. Did we ponder deeply and often upon the shortness and uncertainty of our lives, the madness and folly, the shame and uneasiness of all sorts of sin; the joy, peace, and continual feast of innocency and a good conscience; the serious desire of God that we should all be happy; the severe account we must one day give of all our actions; the unspeakable glorious and immortal life that we may attain by holiness and virtue, and the everlasting punishment in hell that does certainly await all lewd, profane, ungodly, impenitent sinners: I say, let a man seriously and constantly consider these things, and it would not be possible for him to live in whoredom or drunkenness, or in any other wicked course.

For wherever serious thinking and reflection is practised and continued, it never fails to produce reformation of life. It is very observable, that when Christianity was first preached by our Saviour, it had visible effects upon the hearts and lives of men; no sooner did any one profess the gospel, but he became a good man, a mortifier of all his carnal lusts and appetites, dead to the world and all the vanities of it. He despised all earthly pleasures, and was ready to lay down his life for his Lord and Master, whenever called to it. It was then a strange thing to hear of a lewd, vicious, debauched Christian. But in our days, though we have the same religion and doctrine preached, the same arguments enforced, the same assistance of God's grace and spirit afforded; yet we see very few of these effects among us. We can now believe the gospel, communicate with the church in all her offices, hear our sins reproved, our duty told us, and all the glorious promises of Christ displayed to us, with the dreadful threatening of God

denounced against us, and yet still continue the same persons we were before, as vain and loose in our conversation, as uncharitable and worldly-minded, as wrathful, peevish, and censorious, as if we were still in the darkness of heathenism, and the gospel had never been preached to us. And what is the reason of this difference between the effects of the gospel then and now? Why the first Christians did seriously consider their religion, and weigh its arguments and motives, but we do not. They took up their Christianity by choice, and we by chance or education. They, upon the profession of the gospel, made a diligent inquiry into the doctrines and duties of it, and the evidence for it; they considered the goodness and reasonableness of the precepts, the greatness of the promises, and the mighty encouragements to holiness and virtue which it laid upon mankind: and such fruits and effects will always be produced, where the same consideration and application of mind is used. Even in our days, as hardened and insensible as we seem to be, yet there is none of us, when brought to a serious consideration of our own ways, and the concerns of our souls, but we presently find ourselves changed into another sort of men; we have new thoughts, new desires, new purposes, and resolutions. This we see frequently in sick persons; they who have most despised religion, and the arguments of it, while they were in health, yet when they come to their sick beds, and begin to be awakened by the apprehensions of death, into a serious consideration of their own state, how strangely are they affected? how much do they repent of their former actions? how absolutely necessary doth virtue and holy life then appear to them? how full are they of strong resolutions to amend their ways, if ever God restore them to health again? how earnestly do they ask God's pardon for what is past, and pray for his grace for the future? And what is the reason of all this? there was the same difference between virtue and vice, they had the same arguments to avoid the one, and pursue the other before, only they now deeply consider and apply them to their own hearts, which before they did not.

And thus will it always be with all persons, in all circumstances, if they can once be brought seriously to reflect and consider; this is a good step made towards

their repentance; and if they continue such considerations, there is no doubt but they will at last become truly virtuous and holy persons. O! that we would now begin to apply our minds seriously to our spiritual concerns, and entertain the same thoughts that we shall be sure to have when we come to die! what trouble, care, and consideration would it save us, and which will certainly some time or other come upon us! We cannot always live without thinking; a time will come when we shall consider and reflect whether we will or no; when we shall not be able to divert our thoughts from those things which we are now so unwilling to think upon, and perhaps when it may be too late. Happy they who do, with the prodigal, come to themselves in time, before God's mercies be shut up against them! who will with him so consider their ways, as to take up the same resolution that he did, to arise and go to their Father.

S E R M O N LXX.

By DR BENJ. CALAMY.

The Hazard of a Death-bed Repentance.

NUMB. xxiii. 10.

Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his.

THOUGH wicked men will not be at the pains of living the life, yet they wish and desire to die the death, of the righteous, and to have their latter end like his. As much as men love their sins, yet they would not willingly be damned for them; they cannot endure to think seriously of passing from this world in an impenitent state. The fears of another world will often occur to torment the sinner, and make his thoughts troublesome to him. An uneasy bed, a broken sleep, a sudden affliction, an hand-writing on the wall, will sometimes force us, whether we will or no, to smite on our breasts, and reflect sadly upon our past sins, and the fatal issue of them; nay, our own conscience will fly in our face, notwithstanding all our arts to divert or lull it asleep. That which makes men so neglectful of their immortal concerns, so pleasant whilst they live

live in known sins, is, that they depend on God's goodness for time and opportunity of repenting either in a lingering sickness, or declining old age. They are perhaps now young and healthful, strong and lusty; their blood moves briskly, their spirits are active and lively, without any symptoms of approaching sickness; therefore they think it will be time enough to look after another life, when their strength decays, and death makes its near approach. Was this true, there would be two ways to heaven; one by *living righteously, and godly, and soberly in this present world*: the other, by repenting at our death of a wicked life. And it is easy to suppose which way the greatest part of men would chuse. Was this true, we might have both the pleasure of being wicked, and the hopes of being saved; we might then spare ourselves all the trouble of religion, and yet not miss its reward. We might spend our days in pleasure, gratify every vain humour and appetite, deny ourselves nothing that our lusts and passions crave, live without God in the world, and yet at last die in the Lord.

There is not any thing that so notoriously defeats the design of our Saviour's coming into the world, and renders our Christianity so useless to us, as this one presumption; that the whole of religion, or all that is necessary to salvation, may be performed upon a sick or death-bed; for if it may be done as well then as before, what need we attempt it sooner? what need we disquiet ourselves in vain, about the exercises of virtue and piety, or maintain a painful and ungrateful conflict, with the inclinations and inordinate cravings of our flesh; when, by lamenting at any time our sins, and trusting to the performances of Jesus Christ, we may be as secure of paradise, as if we had all our days *kept a conscience void of offence, both towards God and towards men*? since in this we run no other hazard, but that of dying suddenly, which happens to very few. As eternal bliss and happiness is a thing of such vast moment to us, that to defer making provision for it, but one day, is certainly a very great indiscretion; so for man to devote all his days to his own pleasure and humour, and reserve for God, for whose service he was born, but one day only, and that the worst and the last, this is perfect madness, the ut-

most stupidity. The extreme folly and danger of which, I shall endeavour to evince by several particulars: and let us consider,

How little can be done by a wicked man on his sick or death-bed? The whole of a death-bed repentance is generally no more than a few good words and wishes, a superficial confession of sin and wickedness, some broken prayers and pious expressions to the minister, who then perhaps shall be sent for, however before despised; and it may be receiving the sacrament of the Lord's supper, which he wholly neglected when in health: this, with a legacy of his ill-gotten goods to charitable uses, is, in common esteem, making a good Christian end. As I am willing to allow the denying penitent all advantages, and to consider his repentance in the very best circumstances, I shall not instance in such as are violently and suddenly hurried out of the world, in the midst of their wickedness, and have hardly time so much as to beg mercy at God's hands; nor yet in those who are taken with such diseases, as render them incapable of any rational thoughts; and yet these are cases that often happen. For there are many who intend when they come to die, to call to mind their wicked ways, and be extremely sorrowful for them; but their sickness is of that sort, as to deprive them of memory and understanding: so that when they are seriously to consider their past life, alas! they remember not one thing good or bad. The time which they fixed to prepare for another world is come, but their distemper proves such, that instead of dying very piously and wisely, perhaps they depart raving mad. I shall therefore omit these, and the like considerations, and only put the case of one who dies leisurely and by degrees, who retains his memory and understanding to the last, and is able, in some measure, to recount all his former wickedness. And yet what can such an one do towards the securing his everlasting salvation? For,

Suppose he may be truly sorrowful, for what he hath done amiss, and the remembrance of his evil ways is very bitter and grievous to him; yet it is hard to think, that his mind should on a sudden be really altered; (I speak of such as have delighted in sin and vanity, and hated nothing so much as piety and virtue;) that such
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men's judgments would be so wonderfully changed, as immediately to lay aside all their former prejudices against goodness and righteousness; and be reconciled in a moment to what they have so long declared open enmity against; that just a little before they die, they should become as absolutely of another mind, as if they were in truth other men: for a man at once to think, believe, judge, and act quite contrary to what he hath thought, believed, and done, for forty, fifty, or sixty years, is really incredible. So that in truth, the grief and sorrow of a dying penitent, is no other, than that of every common malefactor, who when he is ready to receive the punishment of his crimes, is then very angry with himself for what he hath done. He is sorry and troubled, not that he sinned, but that he cannot escape suffering for it; it grieves him to think he can now sin no longer, that all the pleasure of it is past, and nothing remains but a sad reckoning and account. So that if wicked men are confounded at the sense of their guilt when they come to die, yet this is more the effect of those fears and horrors they at such times feel, than of any true sincere repentance. But if the dying penitent most earnestly begs God's pardon, for the sake of Jesus Christ, pleading his merits and satisfaction, yet this is but to mock God, who thinks it enough to ask him forgiveness with the remainder and last drawing of their breath: for what do they otherwise, that die this kind of well-dying, but say unto God, We beseech thee, O Lord, that all the falsehood, forswearing, and treachery of our life past, may be pleasing to thee, and acceptable in thy sight; that thou wilt, for our sakes, (who had no leisure to do any thing for thine,) change thy nature, and forget to be a just God; that thou wouldst love injuries and oppression, call ambition wisdom, and charity foolishness. Certainly they who depend upon such prayers, have either found out a new God, or made one.

And should he back his prayer with restitution of all that he hath gotten unjustly, and with charity to the poor, and forgiveness of all the injuries he hath received from other men, (which are excellent beginnings of a new life, if done in time,) yet there can be no virtue or praise in restoring that which we can no longer keep, or in giving away what we must necessa-

rily part with. And as for pardoning injuries received, alas! wicked men in their life-time, take present pay, immediate revenge; there being not one injury done them, that they have not fully returned. Lastly, the utmost that a sick or dying sinner can do, is to make strong and sincere resolutions against his former evil courses, and to walk in all virtue and godliness, should God continue his life. This is what men usually trust to in this extremity; they hope God will accept of such unfeigned resolutions, for repentance.— But let us consider, that there is nothing more easy than to resolve well, especially when we are under fear; that there is nothing so difficult which men will not readily promise to perform, if thereby they may but deliver themselves from a pressing and imminent danger. But yet how hard do we find it by daily experience, to keep close and constant to those religious resolutions, which we make even in the time of our health and vigour, and that upon the most serious deliberation? How many have we known, who in sickness and under the fears and apprehensions of death, have by most solemn, and no doubt sincere vows, obliged themselves to walk in better ways; and yet, as soon as restored to health, have presently returned like the dog to the vomit, or the sow to her wallowing in the mire? The only time then of making good and lasting resolutions of living well, is when we can examine indifferently, and determine impartially, when our judgments are good, and our passions quick. But all the purposes of sick men, are most commonly like the vows of a mariner in a great tempest, which vanish away and are forgotten upon altering of the weather. Thus the ungodly man's resolutions are just according to the degree of danger he is in; so long as there are hopes of recovery, his intentions of amendment are weak and slender; but as death comes near, his resolutions encrease, and get strength; and when he finds little hopes of living any longer, then he strenuously resolves to live better; that is, he promises and vows to do, what according to his own fears and opinion is impossible to be done. And can we think God will accept of such a purpose of living well, founded on no other consideration or motive, than that a person believes his life is just gone?

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But suppose the dying man resolves to leave all his sins; yet, alas! he hath entertained them so long, that they are not so easily parted with! even good men spend a great part of their time in most hearty and frequent begging the divine assistance, in using their utmost endeavours to conquer and subdue their unruly passions; and even wicked men complain enough of the difficulty of this. What more common with them, than to say, it is impossible to resist the allurements of good company, the charms of beauty, or the temptations of gain and honour? Nay, do they not often try to excuse themselves in many sins, by pleading that they are so used to them, that they cannot possibly leave them? For instance, that they swear before they think of it; that they cannot restrain their passion when provoked; that they have tried to break off some lewd customs, and have prevailed for a while, but that then they have returned upon them with greater violence; and can they then think this so easy when they come to die, that a good resolution and a few prayers shall, in an hour, or a day, so vanquish sin in general, as to qualify them to appear before God?

When therefore men make such resolutions of amendment, they resolve they know not what, for it is a work of great time and patience: it requires long consideration, assiduous watchfulness and unwearied diligence, to extirpate those inveterate habits, which by a long wicked life we have contracted. To mortify those lusts that have so long tyrannized and domineered over us, is a work that must be done by degrees. There is very little regard therefore to be given to such hasty resolutions, as are violently extorted from us by great and present fear; and be they never so strong and sincere, yet still there is a great difference between resolving and performing. Besides, why should that be thought sufficient to save us at the last gasp, which all agree is not sufficient to put us in a state of salvation, whilst we continue well and in health? Wishes and purposes made in the time of our strength do not alone make a bad man good; why then should they alone be sufficient on our death bed? I proceed

To consider how far short all this comes of what the holy scriptures require as the indispensable conditions of salvation. For should all which a wicked man may do

upon his death-bed amount to repentance, yet where is obedience to the laws of the gospel? As for those indeed who in the sincerity of their hearts have done God's will, their repentance shall be accepted for what they have fallen short in, and which the best of us all have need to lament. But certainly a short repentance at last was never intended to answer for an universal disobedience and a whole life of wickedness. Repentance from dead works, and resolutions of a godly life, are required as a preparative for Christianity, and are therefore necessary in adult persons even before their baptism; but then by our Christian profession, which we take upon us in baptism, we are obliged to a new life, to all manner of purity and righteousness; wherein we expressly promise to walk in God's holy commandments all our days; the keeping whereof is absolutely necessary for the obtaining our future reward. This I shall illustrate briefly thus: The ways of virtue and righteousness, and of sin and wickedness, are two roads that are perfectly opposite, and directly contrary to each other. Suppose then a man, for a great reward, is obliged in one day to travel so many miles northward, but presuming he hath time enough to do this in, he travels the quite contrary way, and goes southward; at last, all on a sudden, when the sun is just ready to set, and night comes on apace, then he begins to consider how much he is out of his way; and finding himself weary and unfit for travel, and lamenting his own folly in losing his reward, promiseth if he were to begin again, he would go directly to the place commanded. But ought this man to have the promised reward? since before he can challenge that, he must first return back to the point from whence he set out, and even then he has his whole journey still to go. This is just the case of a wicked man upon his death-bed; he is not only to unravel all his former works, to break off all his lewd customs, to mortify all his foolish passions, and unruly lusts, to forsake all his deadly sins, and to repent of his past ill-spent life; but he is then to live a new life, to accustom himself to the practice of goodness, and to make it habitual to him. His mind is then to be furnished with all Christian virtues and graces, he hath his whole race still to run, and his salvation to work out; and is the least part of this possible

possible to be done on a languishing bed of sickness?

If we make religion the business of our whole lives, and in everything exercise ourselves to keep a conscience unblamable; yet when we come to die, we shall find work enough to employ us. To behave decently and as becomes Christians in such a condition, patiently to bear our affliction, cheerfully to submit to God's will, to beg pardon for our manifold failings and miscarriages, readily to leave the world, and all that is dear to us in it; these, and many more, are the exercises of a Christian on a bed of sickness. And how few are there that are then able to bear up with any tolerable courage? We do not count him a wise man that will leave so much as his worldly affairs at that time unsettled. And when our very natural powers and faculties are disabled, when our bodies are full of pain, and our minds of distractions and perplexities; how shall we be able to do all that work, for which our whole life is little enough, and for which alone we were born into this world? This the devil subtilly foresees, and if he can but prevail with men to put off the care of religion till a sick-bed, he will then find other employment for them. And as before in their life-time, he told them it was too soon, so then he will suggest that it is too late to repent and turn to God. Let those who think of deferring their repentance till a death-bed, sometimes visit sick persons; let them look on their condition, when they lie a dying, and then judge whether that be a fit time to do so great a work in? They may then see how troubled and disturbed their thoughts and minds as well as bodies are; how fast their reason and understanding decay; how their memories are lost, their senses fail them, and how unable to help themselves. And is this a time to prepare for eternity; to vanquish all sins, and to obtain all grace? Is this the fittest opportunity we can chuse to make our peace with God, to sue out our pardon, and to perform all those duties of piety, mercy, justice, and charity, in which we have been hitherto defective? or rather are not they then happy, who at such a time have nothing else to do but to die? Would we but take the opinion of those who are themselves in this condition, and be moved by their judgments, they will give testimony to the truth of what

has been said. Do not they when surprised by death, offer all their goods and substance, for which they have so long and vainly laboured, to procure, if possible, some longer time, though it was but a short truce, and little respite? What are they not willing to give, on condition that God would spare them yet *a little while before they go hence, and be no more seen?* Did you ever hear of any dying penitent, that did not a thousand times wish he had begun sooner? And how earnestly do such warn every one by their example, to take heed of trusting to a death-bed repentance? But

The last thing proper to be considered is, what hopes or encouragement God hath given us, to believe, that he will abate of those conditions, which are required in the gospel. Now, though the conditions of salvation are the same to persons sick and dying as to men in health, and that both are under the same covenant, and the same actual obedience is required of all under equal penalties, yet there are two instances commonly mentioned in favour of a death-bed repentance: the one is that of the labourers, *who came into the vineyard at the eleventh hour, and yet received equal wages with those that came in at the first, and had borne the heat of the day.* But it is to be observed,

That these labourers came in as soon as they were called and invited; had they been offered work, and all the day refused, and only at last, just in the close of the evening, been willing to have worked, this had been something like the case of Christians delaying repentance till they are just summoned to give an account. But this parable rather represents the case of an heathen man, that never heard of Christ, or his religion, till just before his death; whose coming into the church so late, shall not therefore hinder his receiving a full reward. But this is by no means the condition of those, who having made a covenant with Christ in baptism, and afterwards most notoriously failed in performing what they promised, do then only return to their service *when the night is come, in which no man can work.* He that came in at the eleventh hour was under no engagement to work any sooner; he had no where promised it, nor had the master commanded it, and therefore he was without fault. And he who came in at the eleventh hour did yet work one hour, which though but a short

a short time, yet is very different from that man's who comes in but at the twelfth, which is the case of all death-bed penitents.

The other instance often named in favour of a death-bed repentance, is that of the thief on the cross; a case so very miraculous and extraordinary, that the like never can be expected again, unless our blessed Lord should once more descend from heaven, and suffer in company with some condemned sinner, who had such a wonderful repentance and faith as his was. But this example affords but little comfort to those who have for many years professed the religion of Jesus, and yet deferred the practice of it till their death.

But some will say, is there then no hopes, no remedy? what must a wicked man do when he happens to be thus surprised by death? I am far from taking upon me to limit the mercies of God; they are over all his works, and are as infinite as himself. Such persons therefore, as have spent their days in luxury, profaneness, and contempt of all religion, but at last humbly beg pardon, heartily promise, and resolve amendment, we must leave to his goodness, pity, and gracious compassion, who, though he ties us up to rules, yet is not himself bound by them, and who may do more for us than he hath any where promised. And therefore persons in such circumstances ought to be encouraged and quickened to do all that they can, and to submit themselves to God's good pleasure. All that can be said to such men is, that the greater and more remarkable their repentance is, the more hopes there will be of their forgiveness. But certain it is, that God hath no where expressly declared that he will accept of all our sorrows, submissions, promises, and restitutions, made on a sick bed; all these do not amount to what is the plain condition of the covenant of grace. Indeed what God may do none can say; but he hath plainly enough told us what we are to do; and it is the greatest madness in the world to run so great a hazard, as that we cannot be saved without a dispensation from the ordinary rule. "Do I say" (saith St. Augustine) such an one shall "be damned? I dare not. Do I say he" "shall be saved? I cannot. What say" "I then? Will you free yourself from" "all uncertainty in this matter? Repent" "now whilst you are in health; for-" "sake your sins whilst you are able

"to commit them, and then you are" "sure of pardon." There is indeed another church in the world that can teach men how to be saved on a death-bed, even without repentance; who hath found out ways to make it very easy for any ungodly wretch to secure himself from hell, by less than half an hour's work; but we have not so learned Christ, nor dare we give men certain assurance of everlasting life on any other terms than of a constant habitual obedience to the laws of the gospel. The only certain way to die well is to live well.

Nor shall I go about to determine how much of our life must be spent in the practice of righteousness and goodness, before we can be said to have lived well, since this varies according to the circumstances of men, which are infinite: however, I think this may safely be said, that so much time of our life ought to be spent in the practice of goodness, as will be necessary to make us holy, humble, pure, meek, patient, just, temperate lovers of God and men; for the gospel does not promise eternal life and glory to any but persons thus qualified; and it is certain, that a few pious wishes, prayers, and purposes, made at our death, will not suffice to denominate us such. God doth not watch just how men die, but he will judge every man according to his works, and the deeds he hath done in the flesh; and those dispositions we have nourished, loved, and delighted in all our life, will follow and attend us to another world.

To conclude: Let us not judge nor censure others whose lives we may have been acquainted with, and whose condition may seem sad and deplorable; (such we are to pity, pray for, and exercise our charity upon, and leave to God's mercy;) but let us resolve not to defer the care of our own souls to a sick or death-bed, but to-day, even whilst it is called to-day, to depart from iniquity. Let us all endeavour therefore, so to live now, as we shall wish we had done when we come to lie upon our death-bed; let us pursue those things now, which we shall then like to think of, and reflect upon with pleasure; and presently forsake all such things, the remembrance of which, at that time, will be bitter to us. Let us whilst we are well and in health, entertain the same thoughts and apprehensions of things, that we shall have when we are sick and dying. Let us now as much despise this

this world, think as ill of sin, as seriously of God and eternity, as we shall then do; for this is the great commendation of the righteous man, that every one desires to die his death; that at last all men are of his mind and persuasion, and would chuse his condition, and say, *let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his.*

S E R M O N LXXI.

By ARCHBISHOP SHARPE.

A Serious Persuasive to a Holy Life.

PHIL. iv. 8.

Whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, if there be any praise, think on these things.

HERE are many particulars recommended by the apostle, to our thoughts and practice, though not so many as the words which express them, there being several used in this enumeration of the same meaning and import; and which may be reduced to these following observations, and are so many instances of a Christian's duty: namely, a constant adherence to the true religion; honesty and justice in our dealings; a life of chastity and purity; and the constant practice of every thing virtuous and commendable. — This being the true meaning of the words, I shall make them the heads of my present exhortation.

And first, *Whatsoever things are true, think on these things.* The truths St. Paul here exhorts us to remember, are no doubt the truths of the gospel, delivered by our Saviour; these we should think on, persist in, and never be prevailed on to depart from. It is an inestimable blessing of God to this kingdom, that he not only vouchsafes us the light of his gospel, but has also delivered it to us, with greater purity and sincerity, and freer from the mixture of errors, than to any other people. Were we all sensible of the state of religion in other countries, we should soon be convinced how exceedingly happy we of this church are, above all Christians in Christendom. Let us therefore firmly adhere to the truths we have been taught and do profess; and to that

church from whom we learnt them. Though I think no church infallible, yet if the truths of religion are to be taken from the rules of holy scriptures, and the platform of the primitive churches, then the church of England, both as to doctrine and practice, is undoubtedly the purest this day in the world; the most orthodox in faith, the freest from idolatry, superstition, and enthusiasm, of any now extant. This I can say, and declare it with great seriousness and sincerity, that if the religion of Jesus Christ, delivered in the New Testament, is the true religion, as most certain it is, then I believe in my conscience, that the communion of the church of England is a safe way to salvation, nay, the safest of any I know in the world. And therefore let me exhort you, stedfastly to hold fast and persevere in this communion. As here we have the things that are true, let us think of, and heartily embrace them, live and die in the profession of them.

The next thing recommended to us, is universal honesty, justice, and righteousness in our conversation. *Whatsoever things are true, honest, and just; think on these things.* The words honest and just import the same thing, though sometimes honest signifies grave or venerable. And indeed, if we are not sincerely just and honest, it is in vain to expect any advantage from our professing the truth. Whoever can allow himself in the practice of any knavish, dishonest, indirect dealing, however orthodox his belief and opinion may be, yet he is no true Christian. Let then our interests be what they will, yet in all our dealings we must be strictly just and upright; use no tricks, practise no ill arts to serve our ends; but in all our transactions with men, we must deal with that simplicity, integrity, and good conscience, as becomes those who are the disciples of him who was the most innocent, sincere, and upright person in the world. For no dishonesty can prosper long; whatever present turns it may serve, in a little time it will be bitterly repented; but righteousness and justice will establish a man's ways; the upright man, though not always the richest, is ever the safest.

The apostle having recommended to our practice whatever is true, honest, and just, he then adds, things that are pure; meaning thereby that we should study to be chaste and temperate in our hearts and

and lives, avoiding all manner of lewdness and sensuality. And if it was necessary to put Christians in mind of this, in an age of so much strictness and devotion, it is abundantly more so in ours, when luxury, debauchery, and all manner of immorality so greatly prevail among us. I pray God to make us all sensible of the great folly and wickedness; the danger and dreadful consequences of such practices. And if we would preserve a sense of religion on our minds; if we have any regard for our health, estates, and families; any intention not to entail sottishness and diseases on our families; if we love our souls, and hope to see God, *let us abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul.* Let us learn to live soberly and chastely, to practise purity and temperance, to avoid whoredom and drunkenness. For however we may slight these things, yet we are expressly told, that whoremongers and adulterers God will judge. *That neither adulterers, fornicators, unclean persons, nor drunkards, shall ever inherit the kingdom of God, or of Christ.*

But the apostle having recommended truth, honesty, and purity, to the daily thoughts and practice of all Christians, he then sums up the whole in generals, advising them, not only to be careful in those things, but also to improve in every other virtue that is praise-worthy, and esteemed among men. *For, says he, whatsoever things are lovely, and of good report; if there be any virtue, any praise in them, think on these things.* From hence we may learn what obligations we are under. For if the gospel of Christ favours us with such glorious light, such invaluable promises, and mighty assistances, we may in reason suppose, that in return great things are expected from us. To believe and profess the gospel, to do no wrong to any one, to be free from lewdness and drunkenness; though these are great and good things, yet Christianity obliges us to much more; for we must also be kind and charitable, as well as just and honest; modest, meek, and humble, as well as temperate and chaste. And not only so, but we must even avoid all appearance of evil. We must not only abstain from acts of injustice, but from doing a hard ill-natured thing to any one; not only keep ourselves within the known limits of temperance and chastity, but avoid all opposite vices lead-

ing thereto; and the same in all other instances. For we are to endeavour to be as free from blame in our whole conversation as we possibly can; and besides, to do as much good as our circumstances will permit; this is to be a Christian indeed, and to *adorn the doctrine of God in all things.* Extremely happy and great will be the reward of those who thus walk worthy of their heavenly calling. They will here enjoy the solid peace and assurance of God's favour, which far exceeds all earthly blessings; and hereafter partake of eternal glory. Having thus given an account of what things we are to make the main pursuit of our lives, it will be proper also to say something of the methods and means which are necessary to be used for that purpose.

And the first thing I would exhort you to, is to use your endeavours to possess your minds with a hearty sense of Almighty God, and the absolute necessity of being seriously religious. Though mankind are naturally disposed to believe a God and religion, yet many of us have no lively hearty sense of it; we use religion as we do our clothes; they are convenient and necessary, therefore we wear them, but as to the form and make, we follow the custom of the country wherein we live. Yet as our clothes alter not our features, or the shape of our bodies, so neither doth the religion we profess any way affect the temper of our souls. In each case we only consult outward conveniency, being still the same persons, both inwardly and outwardly; but this way of being religious can do us no great kindness. Our religion will never serve us to any extraordinary purpose, unless our hearts are affected with it as well as our understandings. If therefore we love either our happiness in this world or the next, let us be persuaded to make it our principal care, to get a lively and vigorous sense of God impressed on our minds; and to approve ourselves to him, by walking as our blessed Saviour hath taught us; if we do this, we shall experience the great benefit of it, both here and hereafter. It is in vain to think of passing tolerably through this world, unless we have the hopes of God's favour to support us under the multitude of evil accidents, to which the state of human life necessarily exposes us. And as to the other world, without such hopes we

we are perfectly lost. Nor can we entertain any rational hopes of God's blessing and favour, unless we make it our chief business to serve, please, and obey him.

There are a great many excellent rules and maxims that we usually give our friends and children, whereby to make their fortunes. We are apt to advise them to get a true understanding of their business, and to pursue it with diligence; to keep out of ill company; to avoid drinking, gaming, and lewdness; to study the tempers and humours of mankind, and dextrously apply themselves to those they want to converse with; and no doubt these are exceeding good rules, and very fit to be studied and practised. But still there is one rule, without which the others will signify little, to make the life of man easy and happy; and that is, to preserve a lively sense of God on our spirits, to have his fear always before our eyes, to love him above all things, to value his favour more than life, and dread his displeasure as the worst of evils. He that is possessed of this good principle, will naturally fall into the practice of them. And as to have the fear and love of God in our hearts is the most effectual way to obtain the divine blessing; so it is the only means to make our circumstances happy, if they are good; or easy and supportable, if bad. If therefore we would prosper and not be miserable, let us not be contented with a superficial outside religion, but affect our minds with a deep sense of God, and our duty towards him; and endeavour to impress the same sentiments on our children and friends. In truth, our present and future happiness so much depend on the true belief of a God, on our love to him, and the hopes of his favour; that without it, the present world, and all the imaginary pleasures and glories thereof, would to all wise and good men appear not only an empty, dull, unsatisfactory place, but a dismal melancholy prison. Was it supposed that all things here were the effects of blind chance, or fatal necessity, and that no wisdom and goodness presides, to take care of mankind, no considerate man would desire to live in this world.

But after we have possessed our minds with a hearty sense of God, and of his providence, presence, and goodness, so as to make it the business of our lives to re-

commend ourselves to him; we should, in the next place, be careful to keep up that sense, by a constant and daily worship of him. For the sake of God and our own soul, we must not neglect our prayers. We cannot expect God to bless us, if we do not make conscience of daily paying our tribute of honour and worship. We must therefore be constant in our private devotions; as we every day receive renewed pledges of God's love and goodness in various instances, so every day our affection and gratitude should be expressed to him by hearty prayer and thanksgiving. This is absolutely necessary, if we would preserve a hearty sense of religion on our minds. Those who have families should consider themselves as heads and governors of a society: the first notion of a society being that of a family. Every family is a little kingdom, and every kingdom ought to be a great family. And is it natural or decent that there should be any society on earth not to own and worship God? And yet I fear there are great numbers of families in this kingdom, wherein God is not so much as named, unless to affront him by cursing and swearing. With just reason we complain of the great looseness, profaneness, and irreligion of the age. I doubt much of this is owing to the masters of families; would they take more care to have their children and servants worship God, we should have it otherwise: but if we give our domestics the opportunity of seeing our bad qualities, and afford them none to learn our good ones, how can we expect they should have any sense of religion? They know we offend God by many rash words and sinful actions; but they do not see us repenting and asking God's pardon, by solemn prayers and applications to the throne of grace. Let us then be serious in this matter; and bring religion into our families, and there pay our common tribute of prayer and praise, for the mercies we daily receive. Our Saviour seemed to have respect to this duty, when he made that gracious promise, that *where two or three are gathered together in his name, there would he be in the midst of them*. And the very petitions of his own prayer are so contrived as to make it most proper for more than one, and which seems naturally to refer to the worshipping God in our families. But,

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As we should not neglect to worship God in our closets and families, so it equally concerns us, to frequent the public worship of God in his own house; it being one of the greatest blessings and privileges we can enjoy. Let us then embrace all opportunities, not only on Sundays, but other days, of resorting to the public assemblies, and there join in our solemn sacrifice of prayer and thanksgiving; which, offered up with an honest, devout mind, will find acceptance, and produce such effects as our closet prayers will not; there being certainly more promises made to public than to private prayers; not but both are good, and absolutely necessary.

And as I am now considering the means and instruments of religion, I cannot omit most seriously to recommend to you, the solemn observation of the Lord's-day: I am sensible that some are too superstitious in this matter; and which proves rather a snare to men's consciences than of any service to religion. But to be nice and scrupulous about the Lord's-day service, is far from my intention to recommend. The laws of God and man in a great measure leave this to our own discretion and circumstances. However, thus much is certainly necessary, that every one who professes Christianity, ought to have a religious regard for the Lord's-day, by devoting it to spiritual uses, both public and private. It has been observed by some good men, and which I believe may be true, "that a man shall prosper much better in both his spiritual and temporal affairs, all the week after, for his careful observance of the Lord's-day." And I am further persuaded, that those have little or no sense of religion, who make no conscience of sanctifying, or putting a difference between this and other days; for, was there no divine command to have it appropriated to religious uses, which I believe there is, yet to do so, is both prudent and beneficial to mankind; since, besides the civil and temporal conveniencies of it, we owe the very being of Christianity among us to the religious observance of this day. And it is worthy our observation, that the most profligate of both sexes, who by wickedness come to an untimely end, do generally impute their misfortunes to their breaking (as they express it) the sabbath day. Under this head, it will

be proper to mention another duty, too much neglected, that of frequently coming to the holy sacrament. We can have little hopes of making any great progress in virtue and holiness, if we neglect this holy ordinance, which Christ hath appointed for conveying his grace, and enabling us to overcome our sins, to improve in virtue and goodness. Many indeed are the prejudices, though without reason, against this duty. But whoever designs honestly, and endeavours to lead a Christian life, may with as little scruple come every month to the communion, as every week to church to say his prayers or hear a sermon. For whoever does not so live, as to be qualified to approach the sacrament every month, week, or day, if there is occasion, I fear is not fit to come once in seven years. A due preparation depends not on setting aside some days, to put ourselves in a religious posture; but on the plain, natural frame and temper of our souls, as to their constant inclinations to virtue and goodness. A man that seriously endeavours to live honestly and religiously, may come to the sacrament at an hour's warning, and be a worthy communicant; whilst another who lives a careless, sensual life, shall set apart a week or a month, to exercise acts of repentance, and prepare himself for the communion, and yet not be so worthy a receiver as the other. Though even such an one may be also worthy, provided he is really honest and sincere in what he is about, and so remembers his vows, as not to return again into his former state of carelessness and sensuality.

I verily believe most of the doubts, fears, and scruples, that generally arise about receiving the sacrament, are without any ground, or good reason; and therefore I am of opinion, that every well-disposed person, who has no other design in that action but to do his duty to God, to express his belief and hopes in Jesus Christ, and his thankfulness to God for him, may as safely come at any time to the Lord's table, as come to church to say his prayers. And if so, how culpable are they, who, having so many opportunities, seldom or never join in this solemn institution, which was designed on purpose to be the means of our growing in grace and virtue, in love to God and the world? If then we have any serious regard for our souls, and are truly sensible how

much we want the grace of Christ, to lead a life pure and holy, I persuade myself we shall not be strangers at the Lord's table.

And let me recommend to you not a means or instrument of being good, but a principal virtue itself, at all times useful and in season; and that is to walk in love, to study peace and unity, and live in all dutiful subjection to government; endeavouring to promote the public happiness and tranquillity, and not to disturb the public peace, under any pretence, or abet those that do; especially, not to make a rent or schism in the church, upon a mere point of state. In all ages and countries great revolutions have frequently happened. But it was scarce ever known for Christians to separate from the church on that account. They still kept unanimously to their doctrine and worship, and no otherwise concerned themselves in the turns of state, how great soever, than peaceably to submit to the power in being; and heartily to pray to God, so to prosper their government, and direct all their affairs, that all their subjects *might lead quiet and peaceable lives under them, in all godliness and honesty*. And when in any revolution, a prince was advanced to the throne, that was a good man, and one who would encourage the true religion; in such case, they not only readily submitted to him, but acknowledged it as a great blessing of God, for to raise up such a governor to rule over them. This was the notion, this the practice of the primitive Christians, nay of the Christians in all ages, in matters of this nature; and whatever some may think to the contrary, this is the doctrine of the church of England.

Let me then persuade those who profess Christianity, to answer those obligations to a holy life, which their religion lays upon them. We call ourselves Christians, and should be much offended if any denied us this title. But if we are so, let us make good our profession, by a suitable life and practice. We profess to entertain the doctrine of the gospel, to be taught and instructed by the best master, to be the disciples of the most perfect institution in the world; to have embraced a religion, which contains the most exact rules for the conduct of our lives, lays down the plainest precepts, sets before us the best patterns and examples of a holy

life, and offers us the greatest assistances and encouragements to this purpose. We are furnished with the best arguments to excite us to holiness and virtue; we are awed with the greatest fears, and animated with the best hopes to the practice of it. And whoever makes such a profession as this, obliges himself to live answerably, and not to contradict it, or act contrary to what he professes. For with what face can any man continue in the practice of any known sin, who believes the holy doctrine of the gospel, which forbids all sin, under the highest and severest penalties? Did we but regard the laws of Christianity as we do the laws of the land; were we but persuaded that fraud and oppression, lying and perjury, intemperance and uncleanness, covetousness and pride, malice and revenge, the neglect of God and religion, will bring men to hell as certainly as treason and felony will bring them under the sentence of the law, this would have a great tendency to keep us from sin; and if the gospel has not this effect upon us, it shews that we do not truly believe it.

If we profess ourselves Christians, it may justly be expected that we should evidence this by our actions, and not live as the heathens did, who walked in the lusts of the flesh, and of uncleanness; who were intemperate, cruel, and unmerciful. But let us, who profess Christianity, whenever we are tempted to any vile lust, remember and consider what title we bear; by what name we are called, whose disciples we are; and then say, shall we allow ourselves in any impiety or wickedness, who pretend to be endued with that grace of God, which teaches us to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts? Shall we cherish any sinful passion, who have put off the old man with all his evil deeds? If by our lives and actions we contradict that religion which we profess, we thereby prove ourselves hypocrites; and that we have taken up our religion for a fashion, or merely out of custom. So that the reason why we are Christians, instead of Jews, Turks, or heathens, is, because we are born in a Christian country, and that religion came first in our way.

A Christian does not pretend to have more wit or understanding than a Turk or heathen; but he professeth to live better than they, to be more chaste and temperate, more just and charitable, more
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meek and gentle, more loving and peaceable than other men: If he fails in these, what signifies all the noise and stir about the gospel and doctrine of Christ? If a man professes himself a Christian, and doth not live better than others, he is a mere pretender in religion. And how great a scandal must this needs be to our blessed Saviour and his gospel? The impieties and vices of professed Christians have caused many severe reflections upon Christianity: for there is nothing can more disparage religion than a lewd and debauched life. This consideration ought greatly to affect us: for a Jew or a Turk is not so great an enemy to Christianity as a wicked and vicious Christian. Therefore, let me beseech Christians, as they tender the honour of their Saviour, and the credit of their religion, that they would conform their lives to the holy precepts of Christianity. And whoever are resolved to continue in a vicious course, they had better abandon their profession than keep a vizard, which can only frighten others from religion.—Many are apt to pity poor heathens, who never heard of Christ, and sadly to condole their case; but as our Saviour said on another occasion, *weep not for them, but let us weep for ourselves.* There is no person so miserable as a degenerate Christian; because he falls into the greatest misery, from the greatest advantages and opportunities of being happy. Those sins which are committed by Christians under the gospel are of deeper dye, and attended with more heinous aggravations than those of heathens. And better had it been if we had never known the gospel, nor never heard of Christ, than, after embracing it, not to depart from iniquity.

Let these arguments prevail to awaken men to a serious consideration and real reformation of their lives; let them oblige all who call themselves Christians, to live up to the fundamental laws of our religion; to love God and our neighbour; to do to every man as we would have him do to us; to mortify our lusts, subdue our passions, and sincerely endeavour to grow in every grace and virtue, and to abound in all the fruits of righteousness, which are, by Jesus Christ, to the praise and glory of God. This indeed would become our profession, would be honourable to religion, and remove one of the greatest obstacles to the progress of the gospel. For if

ever the Christian religion be effectually recommended, it must be by the holy and unblameable lives of its professors. It would then look with so amiable a countenance as to invite many to it; and carry so much majesty and authority, as to command reverence from its greatest enemies; and make men to acknowledge that of a truth we believe in God, and by our lives adorn the doctrine of Christ, and glorify our Father which is in heaven.

S E R M O N LXXII.

By Dr. BENJ. CALAMY.

The important Concern of a future State.

2 TIM. i. 16.

—And hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.

By life and immortality is meant, in scripture, that immortal life which our Saviour hath brought to light, or given us assurance of by the revelation of the gospel. For though all men by the light of nature have some apprehensions of a future state; yet their reasonings about it, when left to themselves, are vain and uncertain, often very wild and extravagant. The best discourses of the heathens, and the wisest philosophers, about another life, were weak and obscure, doubtful and conjectural; nor even in the books of Moses and the prophets are there contained any plain express promises of life eternal. The knowledge men had of it was very dim and imperfect; till the Sun of righteousness appeared; till God was pleased to send from that invisible world, his own most dear Son to live and converse amongst men, in order fully to discover this unknown country, and to conduct us in the only true way to this everlasting happiness; an happiness too great for words to express, or our faculties to comprehend. And yet so much of it is clearly revealed in the gospel, as is abundantly sufficient to raise our thoughts, and excite our sincerest endeavours to obtain it.

By this plain revelation of a future state of immortality, is most illustriously manifest the transcendent goodness and indulgence of our most merciful Creator, in that he will graciously reward our imperfect ser-

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vices and mean performances, with glory so immense, *as eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, nor can it enter into the heart of man to conceive* the greatness of it. All we can do bears no proportion to such an ample recompence. Our best actions, so far from deserving to be rewarded, stand in need of a pardon. All possible duty and obedience is certainly due to the author of our being; and should God have exacted this from us, on account of his sovereign authority over us as his creatures, we had been indispensably obliged to an absolute subjection to him; but that he should, besides, promise to reward our faithful obedience with life eternal, is a most wonderful instance of his infinite grace and goodness. By this revelation of immortal life, is farther demonstrated the exceeding great love of our blessed Saviour, who, by his death and perfect obedience, not only purchased pardon for all our past sins, and redeemed us from eternal misery, (which of itself was an unspeakable mercy,) but also merited and obtained for us an everlasting kingdom of glory, if we truly repent and return to our duty.

The infinite value and efficacy of what our Saviour has done for us, appears in this; that by his most powerful mediation, he procured not only our discharge from punishment, but also inexpressibly glorious rewards for us on most easy and reasonable terms. This is what especially recommends Christianity to us, in that it contains such glad tidings, and offers such mighty arguments to engage us to our duty, as no other religion could ever do. For since hope and fear are the great hinges of all government, the most prevailing passions of human nature, what more agreeable can be proposed to our hope, than to be for ever happy in body and soul, and what more dreadful to our fear than everlasting misery? The utmost that can be said to men, in order to reclaim them from sin, and oblige them conscientiously to observe God's laws, is, that God hath appointed a day when he will call all men to an account for what they have done in this body; who will then reward the sincere faithful Christian with immortal glory, but punish the disobedient and impenitent with everlasting vengeance. And if men will not regard such powerful considerations, nor be concerned or solicitous about their eternal happiness or misery, what other motives are likely to

prevail, so as to make any impression on them? For what can be proposed to the reasons and understandings of men, of greater weight and moment, than what shall become of them in a future eternal state? It shall be therefore my present business to apply myself with all possible plainness and seriousness to three sorts of persons:—To such as seem to doubt of this fundamental doctrine of a future state; to those who profess to believe it, but not heartily; and to such as do really and constantly believe it.

As to the sceptical disputers against religion, let us for once suppose, what they can never prove, that it is doubtful whether there will be another life after this; that all those notions of a judgment to come, a heaven, and hell, are mere fables, the inventions of crafty politicians and designing priests; and that all good and virtuous persons have been miserably deceived with vain hopes and fears, and given themselves needless trouble about religion: now granting all this, yet if we would act prudently, and consult our own safety, nothing is more evident, than that we ought to believe and live, as if all these doctrines of religion were most certainly true; because every wise man would run as little hazard as possible, in a concern of so much consequence, and where a mistake must be fatal. Let such therefore consider, how little detrimental it will be to him, who believes and acts according to these principles, should they at last prove false: and what extreme desperate hazard he runs, who doth not believe nor live according to them, should they happen to prove true.

He who believes and acts agreeably to these principles, should they prove false at last, only loses some present gratifications and enjoyments which he denies himself. He indeed crosses the irregular inclinations of his nature, and avoids those excesses which are really hurtful to him; he lives up to the dignity of his nature, is possessed with cares and fears about another world, which the atheist is not wholly free from; and strictly ties himself up to several rules and duties, and perhaps is exposed to some hardships, reproaches, and sufferings for the sake of religion; which is the worst of his case. But then he is at present blessed with a contented life, with peace of conscience, and the joyful expectation of an eternal reward hereafter;

hereafter; and if in the right, he is made forever. Or should he be mistaken, his condition will however be no worse than other mortals. All the trouble and pains he was at about religion will indeed be lost; but if his soul does not survive his body, he will never be sensible of it, nor can the disappointment be troublesome to him, when he goes where all things are forgotten. So that a virtuous religious man may, for the generality, pass his days here more easily and comfortably than any wicked person, and please himself with the hopes or dreams of future glories; and which, if no other than mere fancy, will yet sufficiently recompense any self-denial it puts him upon. In short, if these things at last prove true, then he will be inexpressibly blessed and happy; or, should they be only false and vain hopes, and that there is no other life after this, yet it will be as well with him as with the atheist, in the supposed state of eternal silence and insensibility. All the hazard he runs is, to lose some forbidden pleasures, which in most cases is best for them to be without, even as to this life. If the doctrine of a future state is false, yet he who lives religiously is safe; but if true, he is infinitely happy.

But let us now consider the extreme and desperate hazard which that man runs, who does not believe and act according to these principles, should they at last prove true; for then he ventures the loss of whatever is good and desirable, and of being for ever miserable. Perhaps, nothing would sooner convince such men of their stupid folly, than sometimes to ask themselves, when calm and sober, a few such questions as these:—What though I have endeavoured to persuade myself that religion is no more than a melancholy dream, a political cheat, a common error; yet, should it be true at last, how dismal, and of what dreadful consequence will such a mistake be? What amazing, surprizing thoughts, fears, and despair, will attend me, if, when my friends have closed my eyes, I should find myself immediately conveyed into the company of those spirits which I had before derided, and into the presence of that God whose existence I had impudently denied? What horror and confusion must it create, when my infidelity shall be confuted by such a woe-ful experiment, and I find myself suddenly carried to that endless state, which I

would not here believe any thing of? Were the arguments on both sides equal, yet the hazards run are not so; since the one is the chance of being for ever happy, the other of being eternally miserable. Which one consideration fully justifies the discretion of a religious man, in renouncing and despising the glories and pleasures of this world, even though it was uncertain whether there is another life after this. But of what great madness must they be guilty, who reject this doctrine of another life, against many fair probabilities, good reasons, nay, certain demonstrations of its truth; when there is as great evidence in favour of it, as the nature of the thing will admit. When God hath most plainly revealed it from heaven; when this revelation is confirmed by all the signs and testimonies that we can reasonably expect and require; and when he hath implanted in the souls of men, such lively apprehensions of it, as that they must suffer violence to their own minds, before they can force themselves to disbelieve it. For I verily think, was the most desperate sinner to labour and struggle ever so much, to subdue and extirpate this natural persuasion of another life, that yet, after all his pains, he would not be able totally to remove the thoughts and fears of it.

I proceed now to reason with those who, though they profess to believe an immortal life, yet do it not really and heartily; and this I fear is the case of most Christians. But let me ask such, these following questions:—What is the reason that the promise of eternal life, so immense in itself, should so little influence men, and make their endeavours so faint and languid after it? Are any temporal things so valuable as the glories of heaven, or any evils here so dreadful as the miseries of hell? This none can pretend; because the good or evil of this life is of short continuance, but that of the next is durable and eternal. Or, why are Christians so cold and indifferent about the momentous concerns of another life, as if it was of no importance to them? This can be no otherwise accounted for, but that men do not heartily believe what they profess, or not duly consider it.

Most men, whatever they profess or pretend, or however they may deny it, are not sincerely persuaded of the certainty of a future state; their understandings not being ra-

tionally convinced of this truth, the belief of it is not firmly rooted in their minds. Indeed, was God to gratify the expectation of some men, and indulge us with the sight of these future glories and miseries which are revealed in the gospel, this might perhaps prevail to convince and reform mankind. Would he give us a view, (though but short and transient) of that blessed place where he ever lives, to behold for a few moments the perfect happiness of those blessed souls who are admitted into his beatific presence; or would he open the gates of hell, and permit us to look into that dismal receptacle of wicked spirits, to be eye and ear witnesses of their sad torments, despair, and misery; such a sight perhaps might possibly reform and make us to be what God requires. But God's ways are not like our ways, nor his thoughts like our thoughts. He governs us in a method suitable to our rational natures, and gives us such assurances of another life, as are abundantly sufficient to satisfy and convince men; but yet so as that it may be resisted by those who resolve not to believe it. For if the rewards of religion had been present to our senses, there could have been no trial of men, no difference between the wise and considerate, and the foolishly wicked. God will not force a faith on us, but requires it as a matter of choice, an instance of our virtue. There is no faith in believing what we see; such believe not God, but their own eyes. But blessed are they who have not seen, and yet believe. The things unseen which God hath revealed, ought to have the same effect, as if the other world was visible to us. And as the principles of religion, which concern another life, are not things to be seen, we can only be assured of them by proper arguments and testimonies, about which we must use our reason to judge the force of them, before we can be really convinced by them. Nor is this difficult; it only requires such serious attention of mind, to examine with care and diligence the evidences of a future state, as men commonly use in other affairs, when they would find out the truth. But the generality of professed Christians are so far from being convinced of the truth of religion by rational arguments, that very few of them ever inquire into the reasons of their belief. Their faith is solely owing to education, and the examples of

others, or embraced without any consideration of the grounds and reasons of it. And then no wonder, if a faith thus received without any rational conviction, and so weakly founded, should have but little force or power on men's minds. This is not the faith which our Saviour requires, or that God will accept from those who are capable of acquiring a better. A Mahometan hath as good reason for believing the Alcoran, as such a Christian hath for the belief of Christianity. One great reason therefore of the inefficacy of men's faith is, that their belief of the principles of religion was never well rooted and fixed in their understandings.

But if we are rationally convinced of these truths, and yet our belief is not effectual to reform our lives, the reason of this must be, that we do not really consider them. The understanding hath not such an absolute power over the will, as necessarily to determine it to what is best, for our wills may stubbornly refuse the clearest evidence and strongest reasons, if what is proposed be contrary to our fleshly and worldly lusts. As our will is moved by the understanding to obey its dictates, so is it also most importunately solicited by our appetites and lusts to gratify their several desires and propensities. Hence a great conflict often arises between the truths of religion, which are proposed by our understandings, and such things as proceed from our inferior sensitive faculties; our lusts being checked and crossed by the hopes and fears of another life, tempt us to deny the principles of religion, and with all their power strive to oppose the entertainment of them in our minds. Thus it was with the Jews when our Saviour was on earth; they could not resist those undoubted testimonies which he gave of his being the Son of God; but yet the love of this world, or fear of sufferings, so far prevailed over their wills, as to prevent their becoming his disciples. Though *many of the chief rulers believed on him, yet because of the Pharisees they did not confess him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue. For they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God.* It is not therefore enough that the truths of religion subdue our understanding by the evidence of reason, but they must also conquer our wills and affections before they can have any lasting effect on our lives. Till our belief hath powerfully wrought on our love, hope, and fear, it can have

have but little influence on our actions. The way to obtain this consent of our wills and affections to any truth proposed by our understandings, is often most seriously to consider the immense greatness of the happiness afforded to us; the extremity of the misery threatened; how dreadful our condition will be, if we carelessly neglect to provide for it; and how infinitely the glory of heaven surpasses all the pleasures of this life. If we represent and fix in our minds such things as these, it will by degrees so captivate our wills and affections, as to make us regard and value this future happiness as our greatest good, and to avoid eternal misery as the greatest evil that can possibly befall us. The concerns of eternity are of such infinite moment, that if we do but patiently attend to, and freely think about them; if we will not suffer our lusts to bias our judgments, or stifle these principles of religion; they will at last awaken our conscience, and prevail above all temptations. And when our faith, by frequent and serious consideration on these important concerns, hath conquered our minds and wills, then will our actions naturally follow. For men will live and act agreeably to what they love, desire, hope for, or fear. So effectually hath Christianity provided for the happiness of men, that nothing can make us miserable, but either not believing, or duly considering the great arguments of religion.

I beg leave to represent the different behaviour of men, as to our Saviour's promises concerning another life, by this plain similitude:—Suppose a person of great power and authority should make us this offer, that if we would follow him, and entirely resign ourselves to his government, he would safely conduct us to a certain country, where we should possess whatever our hearts could wish, be made kings and princes; enjoy all manner of health, riches, and honour, and every thing that could contribute to our pleasure and satisfaction; and who would give all the security any reasonable man could require, that what was thus promised, should be faithfully performed: but that some among us, not regarding the offer, nor any reasons or arguments he can urge, either through prejudice to his person, or dislike to the conditions, will yet reject him as a deceiver and impostor; such as these are the atheists and infidels. Others,

though convinced that all this may be true, not having any just reason to doubt of it; yet they are so pleased with their present circumstances, as not to exchange them for such hope: these are the fond lovers of this world. Others are willing to go to this place, but they would fain live here as long as possible, and when they can stay no longer, are glad to be conveyed to this happy country: these are them who defer their repentance to a death-bed. But there are a few others, who, entirely relying on this person's promises, and preferring them to all present enjoyments, do readily forsake their own concerns, and absolutely resign themselves to his direction; and if in their passage they meet with any dangers or difficulties, cross winds or storms; though this may fill them with doubts and fears, yet they resolve to proceed and venture all: these, and only these, are the true believers. When the consideration of another world is become our most prevailing interest, and the main principle that governs our lives, then is our faith true.

To pretend to believe this great doctrine of a future eternal state, and not to govern ourselves by this persuasion, is the worst folly which a reasonable creature can be guilty of. It was the observation of a great man, "that the strangest monster in nature was a speculative atheist, one who denies the being of a God and a future state, excepting one, and that was the practical atheist, who professed to believe both, but lived, as if he thought there was neither." Indeed the difference between them is not great; for as the atheist winks at, or rushes blindfold upon eternal ruin, so the wicked believer runs madly upon it, with both his eyes open.

All that remains, is, to address those who sincerely and constantly believe this great truth of another life, who not only assent to this doctrine with their understandings, but make this future happiness their ultimate concern. To these much need not be said; their faith alone will always teach them what to do. He who hath this eternal state ever present to his mind, is fortified against all the temptations of this world, either as to the sufferings of this life, or the being enticed by any of its alluring charms and enjoyments. When the soul by faith views that place where his God and Saviour

lives, how mean and contemptible, vile and sordid, will all things here below appear? Faith looks beyond this present scene of life; it beholds this world dissolved, all the glory and pomp of it vanishing; and this curtain being drawn, there appears a new world to his view, wherein are joys, pleasures, and honours, substantial and eternal; the prospect of which lessens his esteem for all things temporal. This faith will inspire and animate us with such courage and resolution, as to make us despise all difficulties and dangers, and to think eternal happiness to be a sufficient amends for any pains or trouble to procure it. This conquers the love of life itself, which, though most deeply implanted in our natures, yet those who have been endued with this faith, have not counted their lives dear to them, so that they might finish their course with joy. The exploits and achievements of faith, may be seen at large in the 11th chapter to the Hebrews, for the encouragement of all true believers. But yet far greater and more stupendous are the triumphs of faith, recorded of the holy lives and patient deaths of the blessed apostles, primitive martyrs and confessors, who with invisible constancy endured pains and torments, being only assisted by the grace of God, and a lively faith in his son Jesus. They rejoiced and sang praises in the midst of scorching flames, they took joyfully the spoiling of their goods, and gave God thanks that they were counted worthy to suffer for his name; and doubtless God's grace with the like faith would produce in us the same effects, and enable us to do or suffer any thing with the same joy and resolution. Such a faith will fill the soul with constant peace and satisfaction; so that a good man may delight himself with unseen pleasures, which the worldly man knows not any thing of: this makes him content with whatever is here allotted him, and to be very little concerned about the affairs of this life. He chiefly converses with invisible objects, and therein finds that solid and lasting comfort, which all things temporal can neither give nor take away. This faith cheers his spirits under all calamities and afflictions; and when wearied, or not pleased with the impertinences of this life, he can entertain his mind with those ravishing joys that will never cloy nor satiate.

This faith will arm a good man against the fear of death, and strip that king of terrors of all that is dreadful; who considers it only as God's messenger to knock off his fetters, to free him from an earthly prison, and to conduct him to a place of eternal bliss and happiness. All this and much more will a sincere and hearty faith effect; it will afford us a foretaste of this immortal happy state, give us in part an entrance into heaven, and at last the complete enjoyment of it.

Let it then plainly appear by our words and actions, what our faith and hope is; and that we walk by faith, not by sight or sense. Sense is a mean low principle, confined to this world, and can extend no farther than to things present and visible. But the just live by faith; they govern their actions not by what they see, but by what they believe and hope for, looking beyond this life for such things as are eternal. Let us not be ashamed of this our design before men; but whatever they think of us, let us resolve to be for ever happy, and to use this world as if we were shortly to leave it; so to improve our time, as to remember it will soon be swallowed up in eternity. And blessed be God, who hath set before us such mighty hopes, given us such glorious promises, made such a plain and clear revelation of this eternal life, by Jesus Christ, and by him taught us the true way of obtaining it; who, having suffered for our sins in our nature, entered into the highest heavens, to prepare mansions of glory for all his faithful followers.

SERMON LXXIII.

The Certainty of our Resurrection proved.

1 COR. xv. 35.

But some men will say, how are the dead raised up? and with what body do they come?

AFTER St. Paul had firmly established the truth and reality of our Saviour's resurrection from the dead, he proceeds to infer from thence the certainty of our own resurrection. *If Christ, says he, be preached that he rose from the dead, how say some among you, that there is no resurrection*

of

of the dead? But if there be no resurrection of the dead, then is not Christ risen. That is, "it can no longer seem impossible or incredible that God should raise the dead, since you have so plain and certain an example of it, in the person of our Lord, who having been truly dead and buried, is now alive, and hath appeared unto many, with the visible marks of his crucifixion still remaining on his body: and the same power which raised Jesus from the dead, is able also to quicken our mortal bodies." When the apostle preached unto the Athenians, concerning the resurrection of the dead, the philosophers mocked at him, and entertained his doctrine with contempt. Indeed, it was one of the last things the heathens received into their belief, and is yet the greatest objection against Christianity. *How are the dead raised up, and with what bodies do they come?* are questions that almost every one is ready to make, especially those who love to cavil at religion. I shall, therefore, from these words, shew, that the resurrection of the dead, even of the very same body which died and was buried, contains nothing in it impossible or incredible. And then observe what difference the scripture makes between a glorified body and this mortal flesh.

The most common received opinion amongst Christians is, that, at the last day, we shall rise again with the flesh in which we died. Most of the antient fathers did believe and teach, that at the general resurrection men would be restored to the very same bodies which were laid in the grave; and that as our Saviour Christ arose with his former flesh, bones, and limbs, so likewise shall we at the resurrection. That the primitive Christians did generally believe and expect that they should at the resurrection rise again with the very same bodies in which they lived on earth, evidently appears from the heathens malice and envy towards their dead bodies, which they would reduce to ashes, and then scatter and throw them into the air and rivers, thinking thereby to defeat their hopes of a resurrection. Such of the antient Christians as defended or explained this article of the resurrection of the dead, had generally recourse to such principles and arguments as suppose the very same body, flesh, and members to be raised again, that the soul ani-

mated in this life; and, in truth, this is the most plain and easy notion of a resurrection. For nothing dies and is corrupted but the body; the soul goes upward and returns to God; and therefore nothing can be properly said to be raised again, but only that very body which died and was corrupted. If at the last day God gives a new body to our souls, that cannot literally be called the resurrection of our bodies; since the most proper and useful signification of the word is, that the same flesh which was separated from the soul at death, should be again vitally united to it.

The scripture in many places assures us, that the very same flesh shall be raised again. I will not insist on the words of Job, that though *worms destroy his body, yet in his flesh he should see God*; because I cannot think the primary and original meaning of them doth at all relate to the resurrection, but a plain prophecy of his own deliverance, and an high expression of his confident hope in God, that he would vindicate his innocence, and bring him out of all his troubles. But there are several other texts in the New Testament more applicable to the present occasion. As when St. Paul tells us, *that this corruptible shall put on incorruption, and this mortal shall put on immortality*; meaning the body we now live in, which shall one day lie down in the dust. And the scripture, describing the places from whence the dead shall rise, plainly intimates, that the same bodies which died shall revive again. Thus we read, that they *who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting death*. The metaphor of sleeping and awaking, by which our death and resurrection is here expressed, seems to imply, that when we rise again, our bodies will be as much the same as those we lived in, as they are when we now awake from sleep. Again, *all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation. And the sea gave up the dead which were in it, and death and hell (that is, the grave,) delivered up the dead that were in them, and they were judged every man according to their works*. But if the same flesh shall not be raised again, what occasion will there be to ransack the graves at the last day? The sea can give up no other

other bodies than what it received ; nor the grave deliver up any but those that were laid therein. And was it not necessary, that we should rise with the very same bodies, the graves need not be opened, but we might rest there forever. St. Paul also tells us, that our Saviour shall *change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body* ; which can only be meant, that this our present body of flesh and blood shall be restored to life again.

If we consider the several instances and examples of those, who either immediately ascended into heaven, or after death were restored again to life, they all seem to confirm this opinion, that we shall rise at the last day with the very same flesh and blood which we had here. Enoch and Elias were translated to heaven in their terrestrial bodies. And they whom our Saviour recalled to life, or rose with him at his resurrection, appeared in the very same bodies they had before their dissolution. These being the examples and types of the general resurrection, ours therefore must resemble theirs ; and we must also appear at the last day with the same bodies we lived in here. Even our blessed Saviour, who was the first fruits of them that slept, raised his own body, and appeared to his disciples with the very prints of the nails in his hands and feet, and with all the other marks of his crucifixion : *Behold my hands and my feet, says he, that it is I myself ; handle me and see, for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see me have.* From whence it seems to follow, that in our resurrection, we shall be conformable to our Saviour's, and resume the very same bodies that were laid in the sepulchre.

Lastly, the antients have urged for a proof of the resurrection of the same body, that the exact justice and righteousness of God requires it. Since God's justice, which consists in the equal dispensation of rewards and punishments, will seem much obscured, at least not so illustriously manifested and displayed to the world, unless the same body of flesh be raised again ; that as the body was partner with the soul in all her actions, whether good or evil, so it should hereafter share with her in rewards and punishments ; it being but just that the same body which sinned should be punished ; and that the very flesh which pleased God, should at the last day be exalted to glory, and receive a just recom-

pence of reward, for whatever hardships and trouble it underwent here. Having thus evinced the resurrection of the same body, I shall proceed to shew that there is nothing in this impossible or incredible.

" God can distinguish and preserve un-
" mixt from all other bodies each man's
" particular body, when dissolved into
" dust and atoms, however distantly dis-
" persed, and recollect and unite them to-
" gether ; because God is infinite in wis-
" dom, power, and knowledge. He can
" tell the number of the stars, and call
" them all by their names. He measures
" the water in the hollow of his hand,
" metes out the heavens with a span, and
" comprehends the dust of the earth in a
" measure ; he numbers the hairs of our
" heads, and not so much as a sparrow
" falls to the ground without his know-
" ledge : " and is it incredible, that such
an infinite understanding should distinctly
know the several particles of dust into
which the bodies of men are mouldered ;
that he should observe the various changes
they undergo, and plainly discern to whom
they belong ? Can it be thought impos-
sible, that he who at first formed us, in
*whose book all our members are written, from
whom our substance was not hid when we
were made in secret, and curiously wrought
in the lowest parts of the earth* ; should not
again know every atom whereof our bodies
are composed ? If any curious artist knows
every pin and part of a machine that he
makes, so as, when taken in pieces, he can
distinguish one part from another, and rea-
dily assign to each its proper place, and
exactly dispose them into the same figure
and order they were in before ; can we
suppose that the almighty Architect of the
world is ignorant of and unacquainted
with the several parts and materials of
which this our earthly tabernacle is framed
and composed ? At the first creation of
the world, all things lay confused, in a
vast heap of rude and indigested chaos, till
by the voice of the Omnipotent they were
separated and framed into those distinct
bodies, whereof the beauty and excellent
order of the world doth now consist ; and
why may not the same power, at the con-
summation of all things, out of the ruins
and rubbish of the world, collect the se-
veral relics of our corrupted bodies, re-
duce them to their proper places, restore
them

them to their primitive shapes, and frame them into the same individual bodies they were parts of before?

But it may be objected, that it often happens for the bodies of men to be devoured by beasts, fishes, and other animals, which are afterwards eaten by men, and converted into the substance of their bodies; and in some places even for men to feed on human flesh; whereby the substance of one man's body becomes part of another's; and then how can both rise at the last day with the very same bodies?

To which I answer, that the body of man does not always continue in the same state, or consist of the same matter; but is perpetually spending and renewing itself, every day losing and gaining new matter. This is undeniably certain from experience. For so much as our bodies grow, so much new matter is added to them, over and besides the repairing of what is continually spent. And after a man comes to his full growth, he usually wastes and carries off, by insensible perspiration every day, in proportion five parts to eight, of what he eats and drinks. So that every man must change his body several times in a year. Indeed, the bones do not change so often as the fluid and fleshy parts of the body; but they also change, because they grow; for whatever grows, is nourished and spends, or otherwise it would not want repair. If the matter of a man's body, which he had at any time of his life, be raised, it is as much his own, and the same body, as that which he had at his death, and generally much more perfect. Besides, it is a very small and inconsiderable part of what is eaten and descends into the stomach, that turns into nourishment; the far greater quantity going off by excretions and perspirations. Or if it did not, to what a vast monstrous bulk should we grow to in a few years? So that was the body of a man eaten by cannibals, very little of it would pass into the substance of their bodies. Or was it more, there cannot be so much as is before gone from the same man's body. If a man lives thirty or forty years, his body hath undergone many new repairs in that time, and yet in the sense of all mankind, it is the same body. Suppose a corpulent man to fall into a gradual consumption, must this man at the resurrection have no more of his body than he had when at the hour of his death?

Would it not then be the same body, if made up of the parts it had at the beginning of his consumption? If it be, then the same holds as to other times of his life. And consequently this objection of cannibals devouring men, is of no force to destroy the possibility of the resurrection.

Perhaps it may be thought by some, unworthy of God to concern himself about such trifling matters, or inconsistent with his ease and happiness, to mark and observe all the particles of dust into which the several bodies of men are dissolved, so as exactly to distinguish and preserve each entire and unmixed, and at last restore them to their old bodies. But it is the greatest excellency and perfection of the divine Providence to extend itself even to the least things, so that nothing is exempted from its care and influence. To imagine the government of the world is a burden to God, is to entertain very mean conceptions of him. Because we are of such weak and frail natures, as that a little business and employment soon tires us, does it therefore follow, that to direct, order, and govern the several affairs of this world, must give trouble and interruption to the infinite pleasure and happiness of almighty God?

Our dust being thus preserved and collected together by God, he can easily remake and rebuild the same bodies which were dissolved. That this is possible must be acknowledged by all who believe the history of the world's creation, as to God's forming the first man Adam out of the dust of the ground. For if the body of man turns to dust after death, it becomes what it was originally; and surely the same power that first made it of dust, may as easily remake it when reduced into dust again. Nor is this more wonderful than the formation of an human body in the womb; yet of this we have daily experience, though as great a miracle, as extraordinary an instance of divine power, as the resurrection of it can possibly be. And was it not so common a thing, it would be thought incredible, that such a beautiful fabric as is the body of man, consisting of nerves, bones, flesh, veins, blood, and other parts, should be produced as we see it is. Why then is it not as easy to believe it shall hereafter be rebuilt, when crumbled into dust? Had we only heard or read of the curious formation of man, it would have been as natural for us to have

have asked "how are men made, and with what bodies are they born?" as now to inquire concerning the resurrection, *how are the dead raised up, and with what bodies do they come?*

When God hath raised again the same body out of the dust wherein it was dissolved, he can enliven and make it the same living man, by uniting to it the same soul and spirit which did formerly inhabit there. That this is possible we have several undoubted examples thereof, in those whom the prophets, our blessed Saviour, and his apostles, raised from the dead. Even our Saviour himself, after he was dead and buried, rose again and appeared unto his disciples and others, to whom he was known; who had clear evidence and conviction that he was the same person they had seen expire on the cross. Well therefore might St. Paul say, *why should it be thought a thing incredible with you, that God should raise the dead?* To raise our bodies from death is not so great an act, as first to create them. If God, by the word of his power, could make the heavens and the earth of no pre-existent matter, why should we doubt but that the same God by his mighty power can also raise to life those who, though dead, do not cease to be? For although we cannot answer all the difficulties and objections which the sceptics, wicked and prophane, make against this doctrine; nor can exactly discover how our bodies will rise, or the nature of them; yet this ought not to weaken our belief of this most important article of our Christian faith. It is sufficient that an almighty being, to whom nothing is impossible, hath solemnly promised to raise our mortal bodies after death to life again. Let such therefore as despise, oppose, or object to this doctrine, try their ability on the common appearances of nature; let them rationally explain things that daily happen, before they disbelieve a resurrection, when Omnipotency stands engaged to perform it. Do they know how their bodies were framed, fashioned and curiously wrought? Can they give a satisfactory account of this glorious structure, their bodies, and the several parts thereof; consisting of members, blood, heart, veins, arteries, and nerves? Or how the body came to be fenced with bones and sinews, skin and flesh? When they can answer these and other difficult questions, concerning the formation of their

own body, it will be then time enough to solve all the objections and difficulties about the resurrection of it. But if to do this, they must have recourse to the infinite power and wisdom of the First Cause, the sole Governor and great Sovereign of the world; why should they doubt but that the same power can quicken and enliven that body when rotten and returned to dust, which it first formed? Let us therefore not perplex ourselves about some difficulties which arise concerning this doctrine of the resurrection; for it is no absurdity to suppose an infinite power can effect such things as seem impossible to our finite beings; but rather let us believe what God hath revealed concerning it. I proceed

To consider the difference which the scripture makes between a glorified body and this mortal flesh. Our conceptions of a future state are indeed very dark and imperfect; all we know of it is from the scriptures, which describe it either by representing the several evils and inconveniencies we shall be freed from; or by comparing the glory that shall be revealed, with such things as are here most admired and esteemed. Hence it is called an *inheritance, a kingdom, a throne, a crown, a sceptre, a rich treasure, a river of pleasures, a splendid robe, an exceeding eternal weight of glory*. Not that the happiness of another world consists in outward joys and pleasures: but these things being here most coveted and desired, are made use of to represent the transcendent blessedness of a future state, though of a different nature, and infinitely surpassing the greatest happiness of this world. They are only little comparisons to help our weak apprehensions; but we shall never know the glories of the next life till we enjoy them. For though from the description the scripture gives us of another world, we may frame a confused idea of it, yet we shall never have a complete notion thereof till we enter into it. However, enough is revealed concerning our future happiness, to raise our thoughts and affections above the fading beauties and flattering glories of this world; to make us sensible how mean and unsatisfying all human pleasures are, to excite and engage our most earnest endeavours to attain it. For the scriptures inform us, that our bodies at the resurrection will be raised *immortal and incorruptible, glorious and spiritual*.

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At the resurrection our bodies will be immortal and incorruptible; for *this corruption must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality*. Though the bodies of the damned will be raised immortal and incorruptible, because intolerable pain and misery will be their portion for ever; yet these words do farther signify to the blessed an exemption from all bodily evils, and whatever is penal, afflictive, or uneasy to us. Were we at the general resurrection to receive the same frail bodies again, subject to the miseries we now suffer, no considering person would willingly take it again; he would rather it should rot in the grave, than be bound fast to all eternity to such a cumbersome clod of earth; for such a resurrection is more like a condemnation to death again, than a resurrection to life. The best we can say of this earthly house of clay, the tomb and sepulchre of our souls, is, that it is a building which will soon be dissolved and tumble into dust; that we shall not always be confined to this doleful prison, but in a little time be delivered from this bondage of corruption, be disengaged from this burden of flesh, and admitted into the glorious liberty of the children of God. Alas! what frail brittle things are these bodies of ours? How soon are they disordered and discomposed? To what number of diseases, pains, and infirmities are they continually liable? How doth the least distemper disturb our minds, interrupt our ease and rest, and make life a burden? If any part of our body suffers pain, what torment and anguish doth it create? or, when our bodies are well and in health, yet to what labours and perfect drudgery must we submit to serve their necessities, to provide for their subsistence, and supply their wants; to repair their decays, to preserve and keep them in health? How are we forced every night to enter into the confines of death, if not to cease to be for a time, yet at least to slumber away many hours without any useful and rational thoughts; and this only to keep in repair those carcases of clay, and enable them to perform the labours and business of the ensuing day? In short, so long as these frail, weak, and dying bodies, subject to so many evils and inconveniences, are so closely united to our souls; we cannot possibly expect much ease, rest, or happiness in this life. Our hope and comfort therefore is, that in a little time

we shall be delivered from this burden of flesh; when God shall wipe away all tears from our eyes, and there shall be no more death, sorrow, crying, nor pain; when we shall hunger nor thirst no more; neither see nor feel the light of the sun; *for the Lamb, the Son of God shall feed us, and lead us into living fountains of water*.

O when shall we arrive to those happy regions, where we shall enjoy constant and uninterrupted pleasure both of body and mind, and be never more exposed to any of those evils and inconveniences, to which we are liable in this state of pilgrimage? where we shall live the life of angels; and be clothed with spiritual glorious bodies; neither subject to those weaknesses and decays, nor want that daily sustenance and continual recruit which our present bodies cannot subsist without. That perfect and complete happiness, which all good men shall enjoy in the other world, consists in having a mind free from all trouble, and a body exempted from all pains and diseases. Thus will our mortal bodies be raised immortal; they will not only by the power of God be always preserved from death, but their nature will be totally changed and altered, so as not to retain the same principles of mortality and corruption; for they cannot, says our Saviour, die any more. Our bodies will also be raised in glory. *Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father*. Our heavenly bodies will be like the glory and splendor of the sun. For *Christ will fashion our vile bodies like unto his glorious body*; the splendor of which we may conceive, by the visions of St. Peter at the transfiguration of our Saviour, whose face *did shine as the sun, and his raiment was white as snow*. Some imagine that the excellency of our heavenly bodies will chiefly arise from the happiness of our souls; whose felicity will be and appear in the brightness of our countenance, illustrating them with beauty and splendor.

Lastly, at the resurrection we shall rise with spiritual bodies, but not of a spiritual substance, for that is a contradiction; it being impossible for it to be both a spiritual and bodily substance. Spiritual is here opposed, not to corporeal, but to natural or animal; signifying thereby, the subtilty and purity of our heavenly bodies. In this state our spirits are forced to serve and attend on our bodies; but in the other world, our bodies shall wholly serve our spirits, minister

minister to, and depend upon them; a natural body is fitted for this lower, sensible, earthly world; a spiritual body is suited to a spiritual invisible state, to live like saints and angels in heaven. This flesh is one of the greatest and most dangerous enemies we have; for it continually tempts and solicits us to evil; it rebels against reason, and is ungovernable; *the law in our members wars against the law in our minds, and brings us into captivity to the law of sin*; and when the spirit is willing, *the flesh is weak*. We are now in a state of warfare, and must be always on our guard, continually arming and defending ourselves against the assaults of the flesh, and all its impetuous motions. How doth it hinder us in all our religious duties? How soon are our minds tired, when employed in any divine or spiritual meditations, and how easily diverted from such noble exercises? Well therefore might St. Paul so mournfully complain; *O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death?* Why! even death will do this; that will give us a full and final deliverance. When once we arise unto life, we shall no more feel those struggles of the spirit with the flesh, which are now so troublesome and uneasy to us. Our flesh will then cease to torment and teaze our souls with evil inclinations, immoderate desires, and unreasonable passions; but being spiritualized, purified, and free from all earthly affections, it will become a fit and proper instrument of the soul in all her divine and heavenly employments; it will not be weary of singing praises unto Almighty God to all eternity; it will want no respite or refreshment, meat or drink, but take an infinite delight in doing the will of God. In these things chiefly consists the difference between this mortal flesh and our bodies at the resurrection. I shall now make a few inferences tending to practice.

And the best way to prepare ourselves for those heavenly spiritual bodies, which shall be bestowed on us at the resurrection, is by continually cleansing and purifying our souls from all fleshly lusts, and by degrees weaning ourselves from all earthly and sensual pleasures and delights. We must refine our affections, raise and exalt them in the contemplation of things above; we must take off our hearts, and leisurely disengage them from what is present and sensible, in order frequently to think of

and converse with things spiritual and invisible; that so soul and body may here in some degree be acquainted with those objects, or spiritual delights and pleasures, which will hereafter be presented to us. A soul wholly immersed in this earthly body is no way qualified for those celestial and glorious mansions which God hath provided for us. An earthly sensual mind is so captivated with bodily pleasures, as to be incapable of relishing or enjoying such as are spiritual, though infinitely greater and more to be preferred. But if we subdue and mortify our carnal inclinations, we shall thereby fit and prepare ourselves for another state. When our souls are thus spiritualized, they will soon grow weary of this flesh, and long for their departure; they will be ready and glad to go hence, that they may live and abide in a body suitable to their rational and spiritual appetites.

From hence also we may give some account of the different degrees of future glory. For though all good men shall have glorious bodies, yet they shall not be all equal in glory. They shall all shine as stars, and yet *as one star differs from another in glory; so also is the resurrection of the dead*. Some will have more bright and resplendent bodies than others. Those who have done their Lord eminent and extraordinary service, who have bravely and courageously suffered for his name; or who, by the constant exercise of severity and mortification, have arrived to a greater measure of purity and holiness than others, shall shine as stars of the first magnitude. The purest and most spiritual bodies will be given to the most heavenly and spiritual souls. And this surely is no small encouragement for us diligently to proceed in the ways of virtue and piety; since the more we wean ourselves from sensible objects and things present, the more glorious and heavenly will our bodies be at the resurrection.

Let these considerations then engage us patiently to bear those afflictions, sicknesses, and bodily pains, with which we are exercised in this life. Let us hold out a little longer, for the time of our redemption draws near; when our tears shall be wiped from our eyes; and we shall sigh no more. We are now pilgrims and strangers travelling towards the heavenly Canaan, and must therefore expect to struggle with many straits and difficulties; but

but when we arrive to our journey's end, that will make amends for all. We shall then be in a quiet safe harbour, out of the reach of those storms and dangers that here surround us; we shall then be at home in our father's house, no more exposed to those inconveniencies we now are subject to. And let us not forfeit all this happiness only for want of a little more patience and constancy; but let us hold out to the end, that we may receive an abundant recompence for all the trouble and uneasiness in this our passage, and be instated in rest and peace, perfect and eternal. Let these considerations in particular arm and fortify us against the fear of death; for death is now conquered and disarmed, and cannot hurt us. It indeed separates us from the body for a while, but this only in order to our receiving it far more pure and glorious. Let us therefore no longer profess this hope of the resurrection unto life; or else with more courage expect our own dissolution, and with greater patience bear that of our friends and relations. Let us not fear to go down in the house of rottenness, to lie in the dust; for when God destroys this house of clay, he will raise it again infinitely more splendid and glorious. Let us take care so to live, as that we be *worthy to obtain the other world, and the resurrection from the dead.* Let us in a moral sense, *rise from the death of sin to the life of righteousness, and then the second death will have no power over us.* Since therefore we have this comfortable hope of a glorious resurrection unto life eternal; let us *purify ourselves from all filthiness of flesh and spirit*; let us hold fast our profession, and stedfastly adhere to our duty, whatever we suffer here; knowing we *shall reap if we faint not.* Let us be stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as we know that our labour will not be in vain in the Lord.

SERMON LXXIV.

By BISHOP HOADLY.

Of Christian Moderation.

PHILIPP. iv. 5.

Let your moderation be known unto all men.

THE word which is here translated moderation, signifies an easiness and gentleness of mind, disposing men, not only to be contented and quiet themselves, but to be pliable and yielding to those around them, in order to the general good; a temper always ready, by all reasonable methods, to promote and establish the happiness of themselves, and of the world about them. This temper, we see St. Paul doth most heartily recommend to Christians, nay, he desires it may be one of the more conspicuous and visible parts of their character; a mark, as it were, to distinguish them from the world of ill-natured and inflexible men; and to make a difference between them and the other part of mankind, who are not to be moved by any considerations, to yield or bend to any terms of love and peace. And yet, notwithstanding this, how little of this excellent virtue do we see in the world? And what little hopes have we of seeing more of it? Many men take the word into their mouths, and use it as they see fit: some, to ridicule, and make a jest of it; some, to put it, as a false colouring, to something bad underneath; and many mistake something else for it; and whilst they think they are possessed of it, are far removed from it. There seem to be few, who have that charity that is necessary to the very being of it, and for want of this, many can neither understand, nor heartily seek after it. And yet, from the want of this virtue have proceeded very many of those miseries men have felt in their own minds; the plagues of impatience, malice, and revenge; and almost all the unhappinesses and ruins that have befallen public societies. Why then should not men be willing, if they have any sense left of their own private quiet; if they have any regard to the happiness of their neighbours; if they be touched with any concern for the good of that society they belong to; nay, if they but consider the share

share they may have, and their posterity, in the mischiefs and disturbances that shall befall it; why should not men, I say, if any such considerations are worthy their notice, (as certainly they are,) be ready to understand what this virtue is, and to practise it? and be solicitous to know, (by their own experience,) what are the properties and the blessed fruits of it; and, since the great apostle so particularly recommends it, why should they not (far from being ashamed of it) glory in letting their moderation be known unto all men?

And this subject I purposely now chuse, because I am persuaded it is most proper for the sad occasion of this day, which I judge to be observed most according to the design of it, when such material points are insisted on, as, if they had been heartily embraced, would have prevented the effects of that violent spirit, the characters of which it now bears; and will prevent all like evils and mutual outrages for the future, if sincerely embraced on all hands.

What I design at present upon this subject, shall be comprized under these three heads:

I. I shall endeavour to shew what Christian moderation is, by pointing out some of the chief properties of it, and of the vice opposed to it.

II. I shall propose some proper arguments to move us to pursue after it, and to possess ourselves of it.

III. I shall endeavour to lay down some rules for the attaining it.

First, I say, I shall endeavour to shew what Christian moderation includes in it, by pointing out some of the chief properties of it, and of the vice contrary to it, viz. violence. I shall mention but two or three:

1. Christian moderation will dispose us to be always ready to hear whatsoever can be reasonably offered, for the making up the differences, and reconciling the quarrels and dissensions amongst men. It is a virtue composed of charity, humility, and peaceableness; and therefore must lead to the blessed fruits of those graces: and, upon the same account, it is utterly inconsistent with a mind averse to overtures of peace; indisposed to hear of union and temper, where there have once been differences; and resolved against compliance, and an healing disposition, where once there have been breaches and provocations. This, in-

deed, is the temper of violence and passion, which cannot be conceived to enter into any breast, without the mixture of pride, and prejudice, and revenge; or else without the leaven of some private design, which too often is the case. But to be more particular; in order to peace and union,

2. Christian moderation will dispose men not to be too hard upon their brethren of different parties, or different denominations; not to aggravate their faults beyond due measure; not to be ever incensing and inflaming them, by the repetition and lively representation of them, in what colours they think fit; and this, not in order to make them themselves sensible of the guilt of them, but to make them odious to the world, and hateful to all about them; the mischief and wickedness of which we easily see in others, though we too easily overlook it in ourselves.

Christian moderation forbids not that men should be very fully satisfied with the cause which they themselves espouse; or the way they chuse themselves to walk in: but it forbids them to be ever railing at others; to be always clothing the mistakes and failings of others in the worst circumstances they can invent; or to manage their own cause so as to irritate, and not convince, those that oppose it, or do not fall in with it. It forbids us not to have a due sense of any crimes or errors committed or embraced by others, or to do our utmost to convince them in a way proper for us to take, and likely to have effect upon them: but it forbids us to lay them open, after such a manner, as tends to raise their passions, and utterly indispose them to hear and receive what can be offered. It forbids us to charge all, of any sort, with the crimes of a few: for that is fixing crimes upon those who are not guilty of them. This is not the way of charity and condescension; this is not the road to any tolerable degree of harmony and quiet in the world; and is teaching others but a bad lesson against ourselves. And where is the good, and what will be the issue, when the great business going forward in a nation is a contest between the differing parts that make it up, who shall find most faults in the other, and aggravate them with the greatest spleen and keenness, and paint them out in the worst and blackest colours they can find? or who shall represent their brethren so as most effectually to vex and
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anger them themselves, as well as to set the world on fire against them: I say what good issue can there be of this, unless the good of a people consists in mutual hatred, and a readiness to destroy one another? And yet how many men think it almost their duty to say any thing of persons of differing notions, and differing measures, from themselves? How many men, who are not contented with being in what they judge to be a good way themselves, with the advantages of truth and right on their own side; not without such a due sense of the mistakes and faults of others, as may inspire them with a desire to reclaim and amend them; but think their business is to irritate and expose them as far as possible; and imagine that they cannot be just to their own cause without being unjust to that of others; nay, that no one is truly and heartily in their way of thinking, as to the main object of their zeal, who doth not join in the reviling, abusing, and unchristian treatment of all who think otherwise? This is visible in many of all parties, and all sects, throughout the world; and yet this is as certainly contrary to Christian moderation, as it is to all hopes of peace in the world. For if Christian moderation be a yielding and pliable disposition of mind, then it certainly tends to the uniting the differences of men: and if it does, whatever is wholly contrary to that, whatever lays the foundation of eternal variance, is contrary to it, and inconsistent with it.

But, once more, thirdly, Christian moderation will dispose us to yield up things of little importance, and small concern, for the sake of a greater union, and a more strong foundation for lasting happiness and peace amongst men: much more will it dispose men to amend and reform what may be made better, for the same ends. To be heartily concerned for the substantials and fundamentals of religion; for things of great importance either to church or state; for what is of moment in the worship of God, or the government of Christian people, is that which all are obliged to. Nor doth Christian moderation lay the least obligation upon us to yield in these points. But when these are secured; and when, without any prejudice to these, something may be granted, something may be altered or amended, or added; and this, either good in itself, or, at least, not at all blamable,

and highly advantageous to the interest and peace of the world about us, and very much conducing to a strong union, and a lasting good correspondence amongst Christians; not to be ready to yield in such cases; not to be disposed to comply in such matters, seems directly contrary to any desire of peace and concord; and therefore must be contrary to Christian moderation. For what reason can there be against it? Will it do us any prejudice to have a larger ground for union? Is it not a Christian disposition sometimes to yield even to the unreasonable humour of others, and, by somewhat which will do ourselves no prejudice, to consult the good and promote the agreement of Christians? Or is it too great a condescension, and too noble an instance of humility, to be more willing to agree than others are, and to comply, as far as is reasonable, with them who will not comply so far as we think reasonable with us? Which of the two is it that it becomes Christians to contend for; who shall stand most upon their guard against union, or who shall step first towards it? who shall insist most stiffly upon little punctilios, of none or very small concern to the main of religion; or who shall be most disposed to part with things of that nature, for the sake of what God and their common Saviour love infinitely better? And which of the two sorts of men will come off at the great day of accounts with greater glory, they, who have preferred the union of the Christian world before their own humour, or opinions of little importance; or they, who have stiffly insisted, and refused to yield up the least or most indifferent circumstance to that consideration?

But I shall not enlarge on this any more, nor search out any more particulars at present, of Christian moderation. But only observe, from what has been said, how unjust and unreasonable that account is, which is given by many, of this virtue; by those only, I mean, who are such strangers to it themselves, that they cannot bear the least pretence to it in others; who would make the world believe, that it proceeds from an indifference to all religion, and from a mind very lukewarm in its zeal for God: when, in truth, Christian moderation proceeds from a great zeal for all that deserves it, and a hearty concern for the honour of God. Let them, therefore, answer for it to God and

their own consciences, whoever presume to bring a disgrace and contempt upon this virtue, and those that endeavour to practise it. A moderate man, who is truly so, values every thing as it deserves, and no farther. And as St. James says, that the wisdom from above is first pure, and then peaceable; so, next to his own purity, he has a sacred regard to the happiness and peace of the world about him. And I see no reason he has to be ashamed of the name, or to envy any others a contrary character.

But I pass on now to the second thing I proposed, viz. to mention some proper arguments to move us heartily to pursue after it, and to possess ourselves of it: For instance;

First, if we consider the peace and quiet this virtue includes in it, I mean with respect to the breast of every private man, this will inflame us with some desire to attain it. Compare the man who is possessed of it, with one that is void of it; the man who has a mind ever ready to hear of peace and unity, agreement and harmony, with the man who is never in humour to attend to any thing but what tends to the widening and opening of wounds and breaches; the man who is ever willing to make allowances for the mistakes and faults of men of different opinions from himself, with the man who is always raking into them, and always eager to represent them in the most inflaming manner; the man who is ready to yield up a thing of little moment, and many an inconsiderable point, to obtain peace, and settle a good correspondence amongst the several members of the same body, with the man who knows no such thing as yielding or compliance, but is rather ready to sacrifice the universal peace to his own private fancies: compare these two together, and consider in whose breast most quiet and satisfaction is to be found; and it will be no very difficult matter to determine, whether more serenity and happiness of mind follow upon a disposition inclined to concord and unity, than upon a mind always upon the rack how to inflame and heighten differences; or always eager to take all measures which are effectual to the keeping up variances and animosities in the world.

But, secondly, as this temper of mind implies quiet and happiness in itself, so it is the most ready, and, I may say, the only

temper that can, and must at last, heal the evil dispositions of mankind; and produce peace and happiness in public societies: which is, I am sure, a good argument, why every single person should think himself obliged to pursue after it. In vain are other methods thought of, and made use of, to join the hands of men in friendship, unless their hearts be disposed to this candid and compliant temper. There will always be passionate and wicked men in the world, to foment the differences in it. And if none in it will yield one step; if none will ever bend and comply; what can be hoped for? If the method taken on all sides be to rail and revile, to aggravate and misrepresent, to search out faults, and then to make what they please of them; this rather looks like a declaration of perpetual war against one another, and is, in effect, a solemn protestation, that they neither hope for, nor desire, reconciliation and peace; and seems to be a firm resolution of destroying and ruining one another, whenever an opportunity offers itself. And what a blessed aspect upon the public happiness have such resolutions as these? It may be safely affirmed, that the men of such tempers, and such dispositions, are they, who have, in all ages, disturbed the quiet of the world, ruined the happiness of societies, and who are ever hindering all hopes of a better state for the future.

But see if another scene might not be reasonably hoped for, and that, a scene of happiness to the public, would men but be persuaded to be as moderate, as yielding, as compliant, as good-natured, as ready to make allowances, as willing to study the public advantage, (which is public peace and agreement,) as the Christian religion obliges them to be. Would not this be visible in its beneficent influences upon the whole society? At least, would not this dispose us to live as Christians ought to do with Christians; and with all members of the same civil society? But enough of this.—I shall mention but one argument more to move us to endeavour after this Christian frame of mind; and that is,

Thirdly, that it is a divine and god-like temper, an imitation of God himself, in what ought to appear the most amiable part of his character in our own eyes. He never has shewn himself willing to ag-

gravate our faults beyond the hope of pardon; or indisposed to come to terms of accommodation and peace with his sinful creatures. He desires to be united to us in love and friendship, who are at a greater distance from him by far, than those who differ the most from us can possibly be. He is willing to recede from the strictest right, and the rigour of justice, in order to our happiness. And shall not we be willing and disposed, after so divine a copy, to yield and bend, in order to meet our brethren in any design that tends to the foundation or establishment of a thing of such vast importance as universal peace and happiness? Almighty God himself shews us, in the most surprizing instance of our redemption, how much he values the happiness of his creatures. It is our duty to imitate him; and do every thing in our power for the compassing the same end; and especially to imitate him, in what he accounts one of his greatest glories.

I come now to the third thing proposed at first, *i. e.* to lay down some rules, in order to our obtaining this Christian temper of mind.

And, 1. Let us often consider such arguments, to move us to the pursuit after it, as I have before mentioned: how easy, and sedate, and happy, it will make us in the inward state, and the secret recesses of our own minds; how beneficial it will be in its influences upon the public; how many miseries it might have prevented; how many happinesses it would procure, were it universally practised. Let us then consider of how bad consequence, and of what wretched influence the temper contrary to it must necessarily be upon society; what wrath and anger, what malice and ill-will; what outrages, and tumults, and wars, and massacres, it has been, and ever will be, the occasion of. A deep sense of these, and of the great duty of imitating God in our tempers and practice, will help us in the obtaining and possessing this divine virtue. And,

2. In order to this, it is absolutely necessary that we should free ourselves from hatred and malice; pride and arrogance. Love and humility are the proper road to this virtue; but uncharitableness and pride lead us into paths quite distinct from, and opposite to it. For the more we love our neighbour, the more ready shall

we be to design and promote his happiness; and the more desirous and studious we are of that, the more shall we be willing to yield all lesser points up to it; to comply in any thing of no great importance, when that demands it. And then, the more humble we are, the less opinion and value we set upon ourselves; the less shall we be sensible of any undervaluing of ourselves by compliance and yielding; the more ready shall we be to submit to all good offices; to recede from what we might, perhaps, in justice claim, and to shew a pattern to all about us, of moderation and condescension. But, on the other side, if we have conceived, or do nourish, any prejudices against men's persons; if we hate and abhor men, because they do not fall in with us in all things, or entertain any sort of ill-will against them; this will make us glad to displease and incense them, to heighten their prejudices already embraced, but is never likely to make us consult their good at any time, or prefer it before the least advantage, or most insignificant humour of our own; or to make us solicitous in our endeavours after a frame of mind, which consists in a readiness to yield and comply, for the sake of our common good and happiness.

And therefore, if our breasts be filled with pride, with an overweening conceit of ourselves, of our own abilities, and our own way; if we be too arrogant to hear of any alteration in ourselves; if we think it beneath our dignity to stoop or descend, or to recede from any thing, though of never so little consequence; we may even put a stop to our endeavours after a virtue which will dwell only with a man of an humble and yielding spirit; and sit down contented with our own great acquirements, and not think any more of a temper which cannot possibly reside in a breast where pride and arrogance are nourished.

3. It is absolutely necessary, also, that we free our breasts from covetousness, ambition, and all such designs, as terminate in our own private profit or honour. For moderation, in a truly Christian sense, (however the word sound in English,) is a public-spirited and noble virtue; and can never be completely and consistently exercised by a man who has proposed to himself his own private gain or advancement for the end of his labours. How can he be ready and willing to recede one step from his own interest, in order to the

universal good of others, who has fixed his eye only upon himself; and thinks that only to be good, which is a present profit or honour to himself? How confined must his desires and designs be, and how little must he be moved with a sense of any advantage to others, who has not left any room for such considerations to come at him, but is wholly wrapt up in himself, and his own bye-ends? We can never hope to have our moderation, our yielding and easy temper, be known unto all men; nay, we can never hope to have any thing to do with it, till we have banished all private ends out of our hearts; at least till we have brought them all entirely into subjection to a greater end; and have such a command over ourselves, as that we can make them yield at any time to more weighty and generous considerations.

These rules will help us, if we are sincere in the use of them, to form ourselves into this god-like temper of mind; and then to proceed and improve in it, notwithstanding all the opposition of the violent part of the world.

To conclude with one word proper on this occasion; had the men of this nation been universally sensible of the nature and obligation of this duty, and possessed it in any degree; the wicked violences, and evils of this day, and many both before and after it, had not now been called to our remembrance. I will not enumerate them; but rather pray, that the records of them in our histories may make us, on all sides, more in love with true Christian moderation; without which (I will be bold to say) we can never (in time to come) be secure against the like deplorable calamities; nor transmit those inestimable blessings of religion and civil liberty, we at present enjoy, (under the wise government of those who appear to know the value of this virtue,) safe and unviolated to future times: and this, I am sure, ought to be the hearty endeavour of every protestant Englishman, of what denomination soever.

S E R M O N LXXV.

By BISHOP KENNET.

That we should avoid unnecessary Interference in the Business of others, and diligently attend to our own.

I THESS. iv. 11.

That ye study to be quiet, and to do your own business.

IN these excellent words of St. Paul, and those to which they are joined in the two preceding verses, we have a remarkable instance of the great art and address with which that wise master builder lays the foundation of the Christian life: for as the foundation was to be laid in love, and every part of the spiritual building, the living temple, to be rooted and grounded in that; so that essential duty is here established after the finest manner, and with the noblest elegance.

The Christians at Thessalonica, who were honoured with this epistle, (supposed to be the first of St. Paul's writings,) are those of whom he says, he was so gentle among them, those who were especially dear unto him, and of whom he was so affectionately desirous. Now, being about to admonish them that they should entertain the like gentleness, affection, and dearneſs, for each other, and should excel in that good work, which he before calls the labour of love, he thus gently introduces, and thus powerfully recommends, his admonition, by supposing them not to need it. *As touching brotherly love, ye need not that I write unto you, for ye yourselves are taught of God, to love one another.* Taught of God; that is, by the exceeding love of God, with which he loved us, and hath made us accepted in the Beloved: again, as well by the new commandment, as the new, endearing, and amazing example of our blessed Lord, and by the genius or spirit of his religion.

At the 10th verse, the more to win and engage them, he testifies in their commendation, that as they had thus been taught of God, so indeed they practised this divine lesson: *And indeed ye do it, says he,*

he, *towards all the brethren.* And then, in the same verse, entering upon the good advice for which he had so well prepared the way, he intimates to them, that what they had been taught of God, they were still to be reminded of by his apostle, in order to their improving yet upon themselves, or their increasing and abounding in what already they practised: *We beseech ye, brethren, that ye increase more and more.* This was *addere stimulum sponte currentibus*, to excite and animate them in the race, who before ran so well: and it is the same address which he uses to the same society, in the 5th chapter of this epistle, verse 11. *Comfort yourselves together, and edify one another, even as also ye do.*

After all this obliging conduct and wise insinuation, he proceeds to the words of the text; in which, with the greatest plainness and freedom, he now points out the chief ways and means of thus increasing more and more, immediately subjoined to that expression: *We beseech ye, brethren, that ye increase more and more, and that ye study to be quiet, and to do your own business.*

Where to be quiet, and to do their own business, is, I presume, to abstain with caution, from intermeddling in the affairs of others; and then with diligence to pursue their own. He beseeches them to study both these parts: or, perhaps, the word study is in the construction to be applied to the former only; with regard to which it has the more peculiar energy, as it originally signifies ambition, or the love of honour; and therefore here imports, that men should make it their ambition to be quiet; or as the judicious Dr. Barrow explains it, “should affect quiet with the like vehemency of desire and care, as they are wont to pursue reputation, dignity, and power.” The apostle has used the like figure and turn of expression in the 10th chapter to the Hebrews, verse 24. exhorting them, *to provoke one another unto love*: there being such an elegant opposition between provocation and love, as between ambition and quiet.

My endeavour at present, will be, first, to make some observations on this excellent apostolical advice, which may serve farther to explain and illustrate it; and, secondly, to offer some motives, engaging us farther to comply with it.

1. Let us observe how admirably this rule is framed, and how each part of it

tempers and qualifies the other. The quiet enjoyed by our apostle is such as does not exclude business; the business such as well admits of quiet. Neither is the quiet too remiss and inactive, nor the business too intense or importunate; neither the one degenerating into unmanly ease and indolence, nor the other overstrained to immoderate carefulness and anxiety. Neither recommends he the quiet of those who fold their hands together, and refuse to labour, nor the business of those who set no end, no bounds, to all their labour; but in a word, such quiet as renders business less fatiguing and servile, such business as renders quiet more refreshing and agreeable.

2. We may observe, that as the study of quiet here advised, does not exclude, but suppose, the care of our own business, strictly so called, it supposes likewise, what it might seem rather to exclude, the care of other men's business, upon due occasions, and within proper limits. Humanity is the same with respect to moral virtues and excellencies, as charity to Christian graces and endowments: and it is no less the rule of the former, given by the voice of nature itself, than of the latter given by the apostle: *Look not every one on his own things, (not barely to his own things,) but every one also on the things of others.* (Phil. ii. 4.) Between humanity and charity, between natural and Christian obligations, come in the civil engagements, or the ties of government and society, the duties of superiors and inferiors, or of equal partners and companions: each of which engagements, or obligations, according to your station, character, and profession, gives you the care of others business, and so renders it your own. Indeed, upon any occasion of humanity, justice, or charity, to excuse ourselves by saying it is not our business, is to deceive ourselves, as if we lived for ourselves alone. St. Chrysostome has returned a very serious and sufficient answer to these evasions, when he bids us take heed lest we incur the punishment of Cain, who first presumed to ask that question, *Am I my brother's keeper?*

3. It may help us the better to discover, and more clearly to apprehend, the apostle's rule, if we consider the station and circumstances of the persons to whom it is immediately prescribed. The city of Thessalonica, once called the mother

of Macedonia, is, you know, a remarkable port, which then flourished in trade or commerce, and with which, howsoever since decayed, I presume, you maintain some intercourse, or correspondence, at this day. Now that situation, which gave it many advantages as a place of business, had likewise several disadvantages which might hinder it, more or less, from being a place of quiet. Such was the confluence of strangers of various nations, religions, interests, dispositions, customs, and manners; and such was that, which probably might be there as observable as at Athens, the prevalence of reports and rumours, with that eager desire of telling or hearing some new thing, which, among different opinions, if it pleased and gratified some, could not but discompose and disquiet others. And even in the Christian society there established, and honoured by St. Paul with a perpetual commendation, there appear to have been some persons less honourable or commendable; who, either out of vain curiosity, or thoughtless levity, or mean flattery, or evil jealousy, and suspicion, took up the mock employment of tale-bearers, the no business of busy-bodies; who, not being so ingenuous as to be softened by this milder reproof in his first epistle, he was obliged to note more particularly, and rebuke with authority, in his second. (Ch. iii. 12.)

4. Although the persons to whom the apostle writes were probably of humble or obscure condition, in those early times of the faith, when as yet not many rich, not many noble were called; and although, what he immediately charges them, is to attend upon their own private affairs, without being too busy in the like affairs of others; the rule will yet hold with equal, or even with greater force, against interposing, beyond our sphere and character, in the business of the public. It must be confessed, he that has not a public spirit, little deserves a private enjoyment; and he that feels no charms from the love of his country, can pretend to little share in his country's safety or glory. And this civil, as well as sacred love, is not to be *only in word and in tongue, but in deed and truth*; or it is to prove its truth and reality, by exerting itself, upon just occasions, in deed or action. Nor can it be denied, but that there may be a criminal silence and inactivity in this regard; as there are examples in history

of some who, at the beginning of public troubles, sitting still as unconcerned spectators, have thereby lost the power, when perhaps they had the will, of helping to suppress them. Yet the other extreme is the more frequent, when men are troubled, and trouble others, without cause, and fear where no fear is; intrude into the mysteries of state, aspire to be of the cabinet, and assume the parts of heroes and patriots, without a call or commission. It seems a very desirable character in a private person, that of the wise woman, (2 Sam. xx. 19.) *I am one of them that are peaceable and faithful in Israel*: so peaceable as not to disturb the common repose, so faithful as not to be wanting in duty and service to the common defence; so wise as to leave to God the government of the world, and to our sovereign that of the kingdom; and to depend upon both for the method and event of counsels and actions, of peace and war.

Having made some observations on this memorable advice in the text, which may serve farther to explain and illustrate it; I shall, in the

II. Second place, offer some motives engaging us farther to comply with it; and these as well particular as general.

1. First, then, even nature and reason solicit you (and these are powerful solicitors) to comply with this advice of the apostle. Nature is studious of quiet, or desirous of rest and repose; and though, upon consulting with reason, it is convinced that in the scene of this life it can have no perfect repose, or that this is not the ultimate place of its rest, it still desires to repose itself here in its journey, or to have a resting place by the way. And then, according to its frame and constitution, it does not pursue rest or quiet, absolutely, by which, in its present state, and this time of its sojourning, it would soon grow weary of itself; but rest after labour, quiet after business. All those who, in their several professions, are laudably distinguished by the name of men of business, agree in this declaration, that they labour in their youth, with the design and hope of retiring safely and comfortably in their age.

The men of eminent and public business, the great statesmen, and great generals, those who are *leaders of the people by their counsels*, or who *go in and out before the people, and fight their battles*, are wont equally

equally to sweeten their glorious cares, with the prospect of a not inglorious recess; when, having administered business with danger, they may enjoy quiet with honour.

Upon this common principle, this tendency and inclination of nature, are founded the pleasures of a country life, the charms of those happy scenes, the fields, the woods, the springs, the gardens, and the vineyards; which have been adorned with the finest strains, and the most lovely descriptions of ancient and modern wit, and which have yet a natural delicacy and agreeableness, that can only be felt, as being indeed too fine to be expressed. But still among the desired entertainments of such an amiable retreat, "the exercises of working and walking," (Sir William Temple,) have been justly placed, as delightful in themselves, and are the fittest to introduce other innocent delights. And though the *fore burthen*, and *heavy travail*, the hard and painful labour, be the punishment of sin; yet, when God created man upright, investing him with pure innocence and perfect pleasure, as he *set him in the garden which he had planted*, so he set him there to dress it and to keep it. Which supposes some business in that blissful quiet, some task not servile and fatiguing, but free and divertive, not a weariness to the flesh, but a reviving of the spirit; or,

———— Only so much toil
Of the sweet gardening labour, as made ease
More easy. MILTON,

2. It may farther induce you to a compliance with the text, if you please to consider, that this desire of nature, and this judgment of reason, are confirmed by observation, and justified in fact and experience. So long an acquaintance with men and things, so large a prospect of the world, have shewn you many instances, as well, on the one hand, of that trouble and sorrow, that strife and enmity, and all that labyrinth of misfortunes, in which they are wont to involve themselves who unhappily think it their business to be unquiet; as, on the other hand, of the peace and contentment, the love and favour, and all the train of felicities attending on those, who study to be quiet and to do their own business. And the more any person advances in the latter of these characters, the more he will find the happy connection

between the parts of this golden rule; that by doing his own business he best studies to be quiet, and to let others be so; and that by studying to be quiet, he best does his own business, without hindrance or interruption to that of others.

Indeed, if as was above mentioned, and as good Mr. Herbert (a country parson) so well expresses it, "even in paradise man had a calling, how much more out of paradise, when the evils which he is now subject to, may be prevented, or diverted by reasonable labour?"—"If," says another venerable orator, (Dr. Sprat, History of Royal Society,) "we cast an eye upon all the tempests which arise within our breasts, and consider the causes and remedies of all the violent desires, malicious envies, intemperate joys, and irregular griefs, by which the lives of most men become miserable or guilty, we shall find that they are chiefly produced by idleness, and may be most naturally cured by diversion. What ever art shall be able to busy the minds of men, with a constant course of innocent works, or to fill them with as vigorous and pleasant images as those ill impressions by which they are deluded, will certainly have the surest effect in composing and purifying their thoughts."

3. To these motives from nature and reason, experience and observation, you will add another of the greatest weight from the design of religion, and the precepts of Christianity.

If, as touching the study of quiet, and advancement of brotherly love, it were not needful for the apostle to write, much less is it needful for us to speak. But you see that the doing your own business is one great means of this peace and love; so that if this be what you are taught of God, that likewise is an instruction not only apostolical, but immediately divine. Even in temporal things, every man hath his proper gift of God, one after this manner, another after that. (1 Cor. vii. 7.) By birth and education, by genius and capacity, even by temper and inclination, God hath prepared every man for some lawful business or profession, employment or calling. And, as God hath distributed to every man, as the Lord hath called every one so let him walk; or, let every man wherein he is called therein abide with God. (1 Cor. vii. 17. 24.) Which words, as thus extend-

ed, do by no means imply, that every man should have some laborious calling; since if a person of generous birth, of large revenues, numerous dependencies, and great authority, be not called to the public service of his country, by his counsels, or his arms, it is, as our great Bishop Sanderson observes, (Serm. on 1 Cor. vii. 24.) a worthy calling to him to keep hospitality, to preserve, cultivate, and improve his estate, to educate his children, to promote peace and quiet, friendship and good agreement among his neighbours; and since, in general, according to that true maxim, "No man lives idly that lives usefully."

Nor, does religion, which bids you never be idle, oblige you to be always busy; but, for the sake of your health, and even of your business itself, to interpose that ease and rest, that conversation and diversion, those other suitable refreshments and amusements, by which you suspend, or as it were lose, the thought of your cares and affairs, that you may find it again with renewed appetite and vigour; which sweetly unbend the mind, or else bend it another way, and make the change more acceptable, than the bare forgetfulness or intermission.

Nor, lastly, does the apostle by there advising the Corinthians to abide in their calling, or here, the Thessalonians to do their own business, any ways intimate, that men should necessarily persevere in their calling, their secular calling, unto death, and not relinquish or exchange it upon any consideration. For, certainly, it is happy for them, when having, as we say, done their own business, they may retire to greater quiet and tranquillity, and leave their calling more freely and entirely, to abide with God, or, as our apostle elsewhere speaks, *to attend on the Lord without distraction.*

But he means, that while they retain their calling, or business, they should be pleased and contented with it; faithful, industrious, sober, and religious in it; and more especially watchful against those sins which do more easily beset it. This is to abide in it with God; and he that thus abides, may humbly assure himself, that God is with him, as he was with Joseph, and that *what he taketh in hand, the Lord will make it to prosper.*

Wherefore, your spiritual or Christian calling does not impair but advance your

secular; as without the former, the latter, you see, would be labour lost. Your religious rest does not interrupt, but improve and secure your natural; since without that, it is evident this quiet would be uneasy. Upon the whole, as in the order of faith, and by the institution of our blessed Lord, so, by the course of nature itself, we are, through labour, to enter into rest: but then, in both regards, he gives us, by his grace, what nature and the world cannot give; since his *yoke is easy*, and his *burthen light*, his service freedom, his labour rest, his business quiet.

To these three heads which we have been considering, I believe may be reduced the chief general motives engaging your compliance with this advice in the text: there are two others more particular, which I desire leave to remind you of, and shall so conclude.

4. You know this apostolical rule has been enforced by royal authority, recommended from the throne, repeated, and again endeared to us, by a sovereign, whose example is an illustrious comment upon it: whose sacred power, matched with incomparable goodness of nature, (to use Mr. Hooker's words of Queen Elizabeth,) makes it her study and business, to preserve the quiet of her own kingdoms, to restore that of others, and to perpetuate both: and who has been pleased to honour this national society with an especial mark of her royal favour, which we hope will likewise be perpetual. And, certainly, we ought to contribute what we can, in our inferior stations, to make her as easy and happy, as she makes us, in her highest and brightest sphere; particularly, by taking St. Paul's advice, which she has made her affectionate wish and obliging request; and by offering for her excellent majesty, our *prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks*, (as he directs us to do for princes, and *all that are in authority*,) that under her *we may lead a quiet and peaceable life, in all godliness and honesty.* (1 Tim. xi. 1.)

5thly and lastly, I shall only bring to your remembrance another, and yet more peculiar motive, as the words I have been treating of, have the like affinity with your station and circumstances, here, as they had with theirs to whom they were first addressed. For you observe, that after the verse of the text it immediately follows, *that ye walk honestly towards them that*

that are without, that is, (as the word imports both in ancient and modern language,) not only honestly but honourably, not only justly but charitably; or what the apostle has expressed in that other famous passage, by *thinking and doing*, not only *whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just*, but likewise *whatsoever things are lovely and of good report*. Think, I pray you, on these things, and do these things first out of duty, and then out of ambition; for the sake of virtue first, and then for the sake of praise; the praise of yourselves, and of your establishment; of your nation, and of your religion; of your government, and of your queen.

Behold, how good and pleasant it is, (how lovely a thing and of how good report!) *for brethren to dwell together in unity!* (Psalm cxxxiii. 1.) Yet how much is this amiable, this goodly sight improved, when brethren dwell together in unity and industry; that is, studying to be quiet, and doing their own businesses!

May you, by a continued success in both, as well answer more and more the industrious spirit and good-nature of your country, as increase the esteem and respect of strangers! And by a right use of these, and all other advantages afforded us, may we all obtain that true rest from our labours, when *the work of righteousness shall be peace, and the effect of righteousness, quietness, and assurance forever!*

“ And grant, O Lord, we beseech thee, that the course of this world may be so peaceably ordered by thy government, that thy church may joyfully serve thee in all godly quietness, through Jesus Christ our Lord.
“ Amen.”

S E R M O N LXXVI.

The Origin and Rise of the Blessings and Comforts of Life.

PSALM CIV. 15.

Wine that maketh glad the heart of man, and oil to make him a cheerful countenance, and bread to strengthen man's heart.

THIS psalm is a noble panegyric on the divine Author of nature, an eloquent and devout meditation on the wisdom, power, and goodness of God, in creating, preserving, and governing the world. More particularly, and in the amplest manner, it describes the natural frame, texture, and position, of this our globe, or the sacred and providential theory of the earth; the diffusing and distributing of the waters through its channels and veins, the vast expansion and regions of the air, that clothe and cover it; and the kindly moisture derived from thence to its higher and more eminent parts, which especially need that occasional supply: for, as verse 10th, *He sendeth the springs into the rivers* (or into the vallies) *which run among the hills*; so verse 13th, *He watereth the hills from above*, (or from his chambers,) *the earth is filled* (or is satisfied) *with the fruits of thy works*. And this effect of natural providence, this fertility of the earth in all its parts, is designed for the support and sustenance of those better works in the animal creation, of man especially, the prince of it, and the image of its Creator. Thus, verse 14, 15. *He causeth the grass to grow* (or he bringeth forth grass) *for the cattle, and green herb for the service of men: that he may bring food out of the earth, and wine that maketh glad the heart of man, and oil to make him a cheerful countenance*, (or to make his face to shine,) *and bread to strengthen* (or that strengtheneth) *man's heart*.

The text may very easily and fitly remind us of the original, and the use of these natural gifts or blessings, which so elegantly it represents. As agreeing with the context, it reminds us of their original, or shews us whence they come; as describing them by their properties and effects, it reminds us of their use, or shews the end for which they come.

In

In the following discourse, I desire leave to speak briefly of each, and then by comparing them with each other, or the original of these gifts with the use, to intimate what rules this comparison affords us, in guarding against their respective abuse; and, in the last place, to offer some things by way of farther observation, or inference.

1. First, This expression, in agreement with the context, well reminds us of the original of these natural blessings, or shews us from whose hands they come; that every good gift, every thing perfect in its kind, or beautiful in its season, cometh from above. The design and genius of the psalm, the whole frame of this sacred composition, engages us to *render unto God the things that are God's*, in ascribing to him the things which we call of nature; and so to join in that grateful acknowledgment, and religious observation, verse 24, *O Lord, how manifold are thy works, in wisdom hast thou made them all; the earth is full of thy riches.*

And these three, the noblest and most excellent gifts of the earth, are therefore especially his riches, and such as come out of his treasury, who thus *visiteth the earth, and bleisseth it, and maketh it very plenteous*; and thus *crowneth the year with his goodness*. Accordingly we find, in other places of his holy word, that he is pleased to challenge and assert these to himself more eminently, and particularly, as gifts more worthy (if I may so speak) of his donation and disposal; even in preference to those other riches, which have appropriated to themselves the name, but which, without these, would be so vain and useless, so incompetent for our provision or satisfaction.

In the second chapter of Hosea, when God is pleading with his favourite nation, with Israel his beloved, accusing and even rejecting this his spouse, for so ill requiting his love, one great instance of her ignorance, or rather of her ingratitude, is (verse 8.) *She knew not* (that is, she would not acknowledge) *that I gave her corn, and wine, and oil, and multiplied her silver and gold.* Therefore, says he, *I will return and take away my corn in the time thereof; and my wine in the season thereof, &c.* or as it is elsewhere expressed more emphatically, *Thou shalt sow, but thou shalt not reap; thou shalt tread the olives, but shalt not*

anoint thee with oil; and sweet wine, but shalt not drink wine. (Micah, vi. 15.)

And then, being pleased in judgment to remember mercy, after this threatening that he would so severely teach his people to prize the enjoyment, by feeling the want, or to make them know who it was that gave these blessings, in knowing who could take them away, he promises the restoring of them in greater abundance, as the great evidence and happy effect of his reconciliation: *And it shall come to pass in that day, I will bear, (saith the Lord,) I will bear the heavens, and they shall bear the earth, and the earth shall bear the corn, and the wine, and the oil; and they shall bear Jesreel.* (Verse 21, 22.) A very rhetorical scheme of speech; the meaning of which is given us more plainly by another prophet: *The floors, says he, shall be full of wheat, and the fats shall overflow with wine and oil.* (Joel, xi. 24.)

2. Secondly, The expression of the text describing these natural blessings, in so fine and elegant a manner, by their qualities or properties, and their effects, reminds us of their use, as well as of their original; or, not only shews whence and from whom they come, but for whom, and to what intent, or end; as all for the use of man, so with a variety in that use, agreeable to their several natures, and his different occasions: *Wine that maketh glad the heart of man, and oil to make him a cheerful countenance, and bread to strengthen man's heart.*

Of which, if you please, let us take a more particular view.

1. *Wine that maketh glad* (or, to make glad) *the heart of man*; to supply, repair, and increase, his animal spirits; to give a quick and grateful motion to that fountain, or receptacle of them, the heart, and thence to derive and diffuse a gaiety and alacrity through his frame; such as may refresh him after labour, relieve him in sorrow, or even raise and revive him in extremity and misery: for, indeed, it will ever be a noble rule, if not carried too far; *Give strong drink unto him that is ready to perish, and wine to those that be of heavy heart*; let him drink and forget his poverty, and remember his misery no more. (Prov. xxxi. 6. 7.)

2 *And oil to make him a cheerful countenance, (or to make his face to shine,) a phrase evidently referring to the custom of*

of the more eastern nations, and of this likewise in ancient time, of using fragrant oils and unguents, essences, or perfumes, at their festival entertainments; to which there are so frequent allusions in other parts of the sacred writings, and in the Grecian and Roman authors. And though, by the difference of custom, the expression may seem to lose somewhat of its force and beauty at present; yet, I presume, it has a perpetual meaning, to denote the design of nature and providence in the gifts we have received from them, that to the inward we should add an outward complacency and delight, or, by the cheerfulness of our countenance, testify the gladness of our heart.

Thus may the oil be extended to bear an analogy with all those things, whether in apparel, in provisions, in furniture, or the like, by which, according to your condition and circumstances, you shew, that you are modestly satisfied in yourselves, and your own portion, and delighted with the society and converse of others. And, as these ornaments or advantages almost naturally smooth and brighten the aspect, and make the heart visible in the face; so, if they are possessed in a less degree, or entirely wanting, yet this itself is the greatest advantage, and even capable of supplying the place of all the rest. The cheerful countenance is itself the oil of gladness, and thus a poor reception with a hearty welcome, is most sensibly described in that of the poet;

————— *Super omnia vultus
Accessere boni.*

“The best part of the feast was, that
“the entertainers looked agreeably, or
“seemed pleased with their company.”

3. *And bread to strengthen man's heart.*
After the more splendid fruits and blessings of the earth, follows this, which is the most solid and substantial: this for exigency and necessity, as those rather for convenience and delight: those are to cheer us, this to sustain us: those to cultivate and improve society, this to preserve each individual: those either to excite or express our joy; this to maintain our health and force, or even our life: without those we might seem to want an especial means of rejoicing, and of writing that joy upon the countenance; without this (which is emphatically want) not only our countenance would fall and be

fad, but even our heart would faint and fail within us.

Wherefore we cannot enough admire and extol the wisdom and goodness of Providence, and the goodly order of nature, that while the former gifts are more restrained and peculiar, this last seems to be unlimited and universal, and is very often more plentiful and abounding, where those are rare or deficient. So that, though every soil does not bear or produce all things, that there may be a correspondence and commerce of nations; and though every country be not, like this good land, *a land of olive-yards and vineyards*; yet is there scarce any but which, commonly and in some proportion, *giveth seed to the sower, and bread to the eater.*

Thus at once is foreign traffic encouraged, and domestic industry: the conveniences and ornaments of life are imported from abroad; the necessities of it produced at home: thus while the rich enjoy a larger plenty and choicer delicacy, according to their quality and condition, or their importance to the public service, *the poor* (in the mean time) *eat and are satisfied, and go forth contented to their work, and to their labour.* O Lord, *how manifold are thy works! in wisdom hast thou made them all; the earth is full of thy riches.*

II. I have considered this agreeable expression of the text both the ways proposed; or, as it reminds us both of the original and the use of these natural benefits. And now, comparing the original with the use of them, let us see what rules this comparison affords us, in guarding against their misapplication and abuse.

And two rules, or cautions, are hence evidently suggested, that we should not employ these happy gifts, either to the dishonour of the giver, or the hurt of the receiver. For, though one effect indeed is inseparable from the other, and God is said to be dishonoured when man, his image, is hurt or depraved, and man never more hurts himself, than when in any instance he dishonours his Maker; yet, for method's sake, we may not unfitly distinguish them, as opposed so clearly to the two points already considered.

If we pervert these good gifts to the dishonour of the giver, we forget their original; if to the hurt of the receiver, we forget their use. If amidst such fair advantages, even when the fruits of our industry,

industry, and the works of our hands; much more, if amidst *vineyards and olive-trees which we planted not, and fields which we sowed not*, we become unthankful and unholy, insolent and presumptuous, sordid and uncharitable; then, indeed, we *forget the Lord our God, and know not that it is he, who gave us, or has sustained us with corn, and wine, and oil*. If we become intemperate and luxurious, soft and voluptuous, wasteful and profuse, we know not then why he gave them us, with what quality and efficacy, to what purpose and intention: *Wine to make glad the heart of man*, not to overcome, and by consequence grieve it; to raise and exhilarate, not to exhale and dissipate the spirits; to promote friendship, and honour, and generosity, not to inflame contentions and wrath, or to invite wounds without cause. Again—*Oil* (or any proportionable benefit and accommodation) *to make him of a cheerful countenance*; not to paint ease or indolence upon his looks; not that he may indulge this, or any resembling delight, to such wantonness and effeminacy as was so frequent, and so fatal to the old eastern empires, and afterwards to Greece and Italy; of which their own writers sadly tell us, and which they confess revenged upon them the conquest of the world. And lastly, *bread to strengthen man's heart*; not to surfeit and oppress it with fulness of bread, or dispose it to forgetfulness of him to whom we daily pray for our needful and decent provision; by whose word, (or blessing,) and not by bread alone, we live, and who himself alone is, properly and effectually, *the strength of our heart, and our portion for ever*.

Thus again I have presented to you this goodly sight, or, if you please, this delightful landscape, this combination of natural blessings and comforts; and thus again endeavoured to shew the connection of their use with their original, by shewing the cautions hence afforded against their respective abuse.

III. I am now to offer some things by way of further observation or inference, and shall so conclude.

Now from the text as here expounded, you will observe and infer, that though it be in itself a description of three especial, or most generous and kindly, fruits of the earth, or productions of nature, it yet implies, and therefore commands, so many natural duties; as by *gladness of*

heart, inward complacency and satisfaction in our condition; by *cheerfulness of countenance*, outward agreeableness, civil and friendly society; by *strength of heart*, as well the care of our health, or vigor, as the diligent employment of it in our calling.

Again you will observe, that lest these natural performances should over-shoot the mark, and should render us what the scripture terms merely *natural men*; the text may well suppose, and by no remote consequence, as many moral, and, to us, Christian duties, to guard and guide, and govern the former. And these are piety, charity, and sobriety.

1. *Gladness of heart*, or inward complacency and satisfaction in our condition, must be acknowledged a natural duty, and, as such, to be its own reward; while murmuring and repining, anxiety and discontent, render nature a burthen, and a punishment to itself. And, as this complacency may first arise from the use of those natural provisions and stores, so when, by the better assistances, but now mentioned, it is advanced into a spiritual blessing, or into the divine art of contentment, it then either refines them when present, or supplies them when absent: so that not only temperance in, but even abstinence from wine, may yet be attended with *gladness of heart*, in higher and nobler degrees; even approaching to that, which was felt and expressed by the inspired psalmist, and by another devout prophet, in those transporting strains: *Thou hast put gladness in my heart, more than in the time that their corn, and wine, and oil increased*. (Ps. iv. 8.) And, *though there should be no fruit in the vine, and the labour of the olive should fail, and the field should yield no fruit; yet will I rejoice in the Lord, and joy in the God of my salvation*. (Hab. iii. 17.)

2. *A merry heart maketh a cheerful countenance*, even by a natural efficiency: when we are thus easy and satisfied with our own condition, we are ready for every fit occasion of outward agreeableness, civil and friendly society, ingenious or innocent diversion, and prudent good humour. And when these sweetneses and endearments of civility and complaisance are improved by our spiritual relation to one another, and exalted to religious peace, unanimity, and brotherly love, the *oil of gladness* thus consecrated to a divine use,

use, diffuses itself through a good society, from the superior parts of it, to the inferior; from those who rule or teach, to those who learn and obey. For so we may understand that other charming expression of the psalmist: *Behold how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity! It is like the precious (oil, or) ointment upon the head, &c.* (Ps. cxxxix. 2.)

3. I said, the remaining clause of the text implied, and therefore commanded, the care of your health, and the diligent employment of it in our calling. That this is one of the greatest and principal among natural duties seems incontestible; since otherwise nature, which does nothing in vain, would produce even man in vain, or to be a blemish and a burthen to the earth out of which he was taken; to the fruits of which he certainly has no title, unless by his labour, or his encouragement of others labour, he contributes to their growth: that is, unless, according to his station and ability, or as place, and times, or seasons permit, he renders himself useful to the community, and so *eateth not the bread of idleness*.

But when to your secular you add a spiritual industry, endeavouring, by a timely forecast or providence, to make your better calling and election sure; it is then especially you *show yourselves men*; it is then the force and power of your noblest operations, your health and vigour, and strength of your heart, is most exerted and best improved: it is then, I presume, you may safely apply to yourselves that permission of the royal preacher, (howsoever first intended,) which has so near an affinity, not only with this last part of the text, but with both the former likewise: *Go thy way, eat thy bread with joy, and drink thy wine with a merry heart,—and let thy head lack no ointment; for God now accepteth thy work.* (Eccl. ix. 7, 8.)

I have thus reminded you of the three natural duties implied in, or resulting from the text, and have respectively pointed out their spiritual or religious improvement. From whence you observe, that the moral, or, to us, Christian duties, by which they are thus governed and sanctified, are not separately applied to them under the like division, but applied to them in common, or all to each of them, since not one of those can be just and regular, unless all these meet and conspire to its assistance and direction. I

would only set down a scripture or two, by which these also are thus applied, and enforced under the law, and therefore retain a like or proportionable application with greater force, and more prevailing motives, under the gospel.

1. As to the piety supposed in the text, you remember that solemn injunction: *Thou mayest not eat within thy gates, the tithe of thy corn, or of thy wine, or of thy oil.—But thou must eat them before the Lord thy God, in the place which the Lord thy God shall chuse:—And thou shalt rejoice before the Lord, in all that thou puttest thy hands unto.* (Deut. xii. 17, 18.)

2. As to charity thus applied, you cannot but have taken notice of that express and particular appointment:—*When thou cuttest down thy harvest in the field, and hast forgot a sheaf in the field, thou shalt not go again to fetch it; it shall be for the stranger, for the fatherless, and for the widow.—When thou beatest thine olive tree, thou shalt not go over the boughs again; it shall be for the stranger, for the fatherless, and for the widow. When thou gatherest the grapes of thy vineyard, thou shalt not glean it afterward; it shall be for the stranger, and for the fatherless, and for the widow; that the Lord thy God may bless thee in all the work of thine hands.* (Deut. xxiv. 19, 20, 21.)

3. And lastly, for sobriety, instead of reciting any of those strict and numerous admonitions to it, the chief of which immediately occur to your thoughts, I shall only confirm what was above intimated, that this virtue, even in its moral, and much more in its Christian degrees, is indeed a practical comment upon the text. For without this help and advantage, how well soever we may think ourselves acquainted with these benefits and blessings, we shall not know them as such, in their proper character and description, or in their just effect and influence; we shall not truly know them, as *wine that maketh glad the heart of man*, or as *oil to make him a cheerful countenance*, or as *bread to strengthen man's heart*.

But if at once we maintain and moderate our natural and Christian liberty, so as to contain ourselves between the unhappy extremes of avarice and luxury, of singularity and excess; if habitually we observe such temperance, and occasionally use such abstinence, as *that the flesh being subdued to the spirit*, we may ever follow

follow and obey the divine motions, we shall then know and feel that the kingdom of God is not meat and drink, but righteousness, and peace, and joy, in the Holy Ghost. (Rom. xiv. 17.) If we truly desire, and upon fit opportunities prepare ourselves, to partake of that sacred feast, and that "*Bread and wine,*" which the Lord hath commanded to be "*received,*" which he has blessed and consecrated to so high and holy an use, and that oil of gladness, I mean that spiritual joy, with which it is attended; we shall then apply to the sublimest sense, the psalmist's devout acknowledgment: *Thou hast prepared a table before us in the midst of our enemies; thou hast anointed our head with oil, and our cup shall be full* (Ps. xxxvi. 8.): and we may then crown all with that his pious assurance and expectation: *We shall be satisfied with the plenteousness of thy house, and thou shalt give us drink of thy pleasures as out of the rivers.—Thou wilt shew us the path of life; in thy presence is fulness of joy, and at thy right-hand there are pleasures for evermore.* (Rom. xvi. 11.)

"We beseech thee, O Lord, to give
"and preserve to our use, the kindly
"fruits of the earth, so as in due time we
"may enjoy them; and may use them
"to thine honour and service, and for
"thy bounty may give thee praise and
"glory, through Jesus Christ our Lord.
"Amen."

S E R M O N LXXVII.

Young Men exhorted.

[Preached before several persons of quality in their travels.]

TITUS, ii. 6.

Young men likewise exhort to be sober-minded.

THE great apostle of the gentiles, who made so many provinces to the faith, and had so eminent a part, first in the conversion, afterwards in the care of all the churches, having invested Titus with the government of those in Crete, sends him this epistle, as another solemn charge, to remind him of the end for which he left him there, and to direct him in fulfilling it. In which comimonitory address, as in those to Timothy, who bore the like ecclesiastical character at Ephesus, St. Paul does not only excite and animate them

in general, to the performance of their sacred office, but furnishes them with many particular rules to be observed; in applying to the difference of sex and age, of character and condition; that as each of these required some especial qualities and duties, so each accordingly might have their proper lesson, and more immediate advice. Now it is agreed, that these pastoral instructions are not limited to the persons of those holy and apostolical men, to whose names they are inscribed; but remain a pattern to the succeeding, and even the inferior ministry, that we, likewise, may know how to behave ourselves in the church of God, and to be good stewards of the mysteries of godliness, who have so much more need to learn, before we teach, and to be reminded of our own duty, in guiding and assisting yours. By consequence, every one of the sacred function should think himself obliged, not to rest in general discourses and exhortations, but to apply himself respectively to the several parts of his audience; that, becoming in a nearer manner the servant of all, he may gain, *i. e.* win, and oblige the more; and in particular, should consider the apostle, or the successors of the apostles, the present guides and governors of the church, as repeating to him the admonition of the text:

Young men likewise exhort to be sober-minded.

The original word, according to its etymology, imports to have a safe or a sound mind; and is used indifferently by authors, to express most of the ways by which such a mind, or judgment, exerts itself. More frequently it signifies to be prudent or discreet; at other times, to be honest, chaste, sober, temperate, civil, modest, moderate, frugal, and the like. The chief place in the New Testament, by which we may determine the use of it there, is Rom. xii. 3. where it has indeed an especial and most powerful energy, of which our language, not answering the elegant opposition in the words, has thus rendered the sense: *Not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think, but to think soberly.* Agreeably to this, the verb is commonly rendered, to be sober; but the adjective more variously, as here in this chapter, once temperate, and again discreet. In the text, the verb has been translated with some variety, in the vulgar Latin,

to be sober, in that of Beza, to be temperate; the same in the Italian of Diodati, and in French, by those of the Port-Royal, to be discreet and regular. I would not have mentioned these several versions, but to do justice to our own; which, I think, has here an evident advantage over them all, as it shews the foundation and principle of the rest, and equals the extent of the original, or even exceeds it in elegance and force. Indeed, if we ask, what it is that fixes the true character and genius; what makes the good and noble soul, the great and excellent spirit; what it is that disposes a person for every good gift, and every perfect gift, which may render him truly accomplished and approved, in the sight of God and man, we cannot better match the happiness of the person, and of the thing with that of the expression, than when we say, it is *the being sober-minded*.

In treating of this laudable quality, I shall first offer some reasons why it should in particular be recommended to youth; and secondly, represent some of the benefits and advantages it then especially affords, and shall conclude with some few motives, farther engaging to it.

And in this whole design, I desire leave to have an especial regard to the younger gentlemen, to persons of superior condition, with all humility, adapting my advice to those who are to give example to others.

As for the reasons, why sobriety of mind should in particular be recommended to youth, among others, we may assign these which follow:

1. It will be acknowledged, that it is impossible for a person with any constant tenor to act well, that does not think wisely, or to think wisely, that does not think soberly. But what is of constant necessity, in every stage of life, must be of special importance, in that upon which the rest depend; and by consequence, he that sets out with this advantage, is in the most probable method to go on and prosper. We may say of this disposition what Solomon does of the law, or the commandment, to which it is so admirably subservient: *When thou goest it shall lead thee, when thou sleepest it shall keep thee, when thou awakest it shall talk with thee.* (Prov. vi. 22.) It is the surest guide and direction, the strongest guard and defence, the most agreeable company and conversation. And as the apostle here

charges us, that we should exhort young men especially *to be sober-minded*; so that great and wise king seems to have addressed, or as it were dedicated, to them his divine Book of Proverbs; the aim and intention of which, as we read in the very preface, is *to give to the young man knowledge and discretion, that when wisdom should enter into his heart, and knowledge be pleasant to his soul, discretion might preserve him, understanding might keep him.* (Prov. i. 4. xi. 11.)

2. The morning of our life, our early and flourishing years, ought especially to be armed with this precaution, because it is then we are exposed to the greatest dangers; when the passions are the strongest, and so the most apt to transport us with their violence; when the pleasures and entertainments of sense have their full taste and relish, and are therefore the more capable of betraying us into excess; when we are the most easy, credulous, and complying, and so the most open to the attempts of others, the likeliest to be insulted and overborn by the confident, or ensnared by the designing, or perverted by those that go astray; wherefore, experience coming so late, should, if possible, be supplied by more early consideration, and reason should invite us before affliction constrains us to be serious. Upon this motive proceeds the constant address of the royal instructor but now cited, and who cannot be cited too often in the present argument: *Hear, my son, says he, the instruction of a father, and forsake not the law of thy mother: Hear, O my son, and receive my sayings, and the years of thy life shall be many: I have taught thee the way of wisdom, I have led thee in right paths. My son, if sinners entice thee, consent thou not. Walk not thou in the way with them; refrain thy foot from their paths. — Lest thou give thine honour unto others, and thy years unto the cruel: Lest strangers be filled with thy substance, and thy labour be in the house of strangers, and thou mourn at the last — and say, How have I hated instruction, and my heart despised reproof!* (Prov. i. 4, 5.)

3. As most ornaments, whether of mind or body, fit best upon the young, flourish in the spring of life, and look with peculiar gracefulness in the bloom and beauty of nature; so this excellent temper of which we speak, which is the chief attire of the soul, and to which most other

other good qualities that it can put on are but appendages, is then in the exactest manner fit and becoming; and if it be real and not counterfeit, natural and not affected, easy and not precise, it has indeed the finest lustre, and renders those who wear it the most amiable and charming. For I do not here distinguish between the inward principle, and the outward act, between sobriety of judgment, and of deportment; though in strictness, the latter is not termed sobriety, but decorum, or true greatness; which is so admirably defined by the master of definitions, (Aristotle,) in his second book of rhetoric. Greatness, says he, is a soft, or easy, and well composed gravity; very proper to add itself to the robes of state and dignity, or of those who *wear soft cloathing, and are in royal courts.*

If therefore the prophet assures us, *It is good for a man to bear the yoke in his youth* (Lament. iii. 27.); meaning the yoke of affliction and trouble, which cannot be good, but when it is necessary, and after all, will be grievous; how much better is it then, to take upon him that of prudence and sobriety, which in a great measure may prevent the necessity of the former, and which is itself so easy and ornamental? How much better to embrace the discipline of *wisdom, to put his feet into her fetters, and his neck into her chains, whose fetters are a strong defence for him, and her chains a robe of glory?* (Ecclus. vi. 26. 29.)

4. As youth has many natural gifts and endowments that speak in its behalf, and entitle it to favour, so it has one natural disadvantage, in respect of time, which it would be glad, if possible, to balance or compensate. In this regard, it has been excellently well observed, of birth or quality, that it gives a person at eighteen or twenty the same esteem and deference which another of inferior rank acquires at fifty; so that the former has thirty years gained at once. Now the privilege which custom and civility allow to the noble, reason and justice demand, and generally obtain, for the sober and discreet; and they are the happiest who possess it by a double title. The wise man representing the causes of his address and courtship to wisdom, tells us this was one of his principal inducements: *For her sake, says he, shall I have estimation with the multitude, and honour with the*

elders, though I be young. (Wis. viii. 10.) And in the story of Susanna, there is a remarkable expression concerning young Daniel, that the elders and judges of the people said to him, *Come and sit down among us, seeing God hath given thee the honour of an elder.* (Wis. v. 50.)

This may the better suffice, as to the first part of the present attempt, or the offering some reasons why sobriety of mind should particularly be recommended to youth; since by proceeding to the second part, or by representing the benefits and advantages it then especially affords, we are to shew the effect of these reasons, and of that particular application.

The benefits I shall chiefly insist upon are,

1. That it confirms and settles the principles of religion.

2. That it renders the practice of religion more easy.

3. That it preserves from temptation.

4. That it affords the greater opportunities of eminent piety and virtue.

1. Sobriety of mind confirms and settles the principles of religion.

Great has been the happiness of your birth, and the advantage of your education, (of which, among foreigners, you are the more sensible by too obvious a comparison;) but that either of these should be lasting and effectual depends upon yourselves. What admonitions and advices you have heard, what cautions you have received from parents or friends, books or conversation, are a ready stock committed to your management and improvement; a treasure in which you cannot make too much haste to be rich, an inheritance which indeed renders them the happiest, to whom it comes the soonest. Some of you are deprived of, others removed from, your natural parents and relations, and therefore the more concerned to begin a stricter alliance and affinity with those good principles and wise purposes, which alone can supply their place: *To say unto wisdom thou art my sister, and to call understanding your kinswoman.* (Prov. vii. 4.) You are set at liberty from your first teachers and directors, and therefore should study with the greater earnestness and diligence to *know and feel the certainty of those things in which you have been instructed.* Either by a noble and ingenious curiosity, or by a lawful call of your employment and profession, you have been invited abroad, *to see the evil and the good among*

among men, as the wise author of Ecclesiasticus speaks, who was himself a traveller; and hence you are the more strongly engaged, to *refuse the evil, and choose the good*: especially amidst so endless a variety of notions and opinions, both as to religion and government; in which, (as the historian observes on another occasion,) *multitudine animus distrahitur*, &c. The mind is divided or distracted with multitude; and because all cannot be approved, all perhaps will be despised: unless sobriety fix the mind, and hinder it from forsaking its first love and happiest choice in both. You are left to make your first steps in the world, which being so rough and uneven ground, and so plentiful in occasions of falling, it imports you the more to have regard to Solomon's rule: *Let thine eye look straight on, and let thine eye-lids look straight before thee: ponder the paths of thy feet, and then all thy ways shall be established.* (Pro. iv. 15, 16.) To which you will give me leave to add that great and excellent lesson, which he received from his father, and which some of you, I presume, have received from yours. *And now, my son, know thou the God of thy father, and serve him with a perfect heart, and with a willing mind: for the Lord searcheth all hearts, and understandeth all the imaginations of the thoughts; if thou seek him, he will be found of thee; but if thou forsake him, he will cast thee off forever.* (1 Chron. xxiii. 9.)

2. As sobriety of mind has such a power, in keeping the principles of religion firm and stable, it has no less in rendering the practice of religion easy. We say, all things are easy to a willing mind; but a sober mind is as willing as it is wise. For that which brings in most of the difficulties of a good life, is our too late consideration, when having gone so far without thought, we cannot retire without pain. But he who has the benefit of timely reflection, and what is the consequence of it, an early virtue, is like him that has attained an art or profession, in that state of docility; which having learnt by rule he practises by custom, and having then had the industry to make it his business, has afterwards the reward of finding it his pleasure. And this should be an answer to the apologies we make for our neglect of being sober betimes, when we urge the sway of the passions, the strength

of appetite, the quick motion of the spirits, the natural gaiety and inconstancy of thought. For if the passions seem then to reign and tyrannise, yet their empire is not of long standing, so that if we can now shake it, it will be scarce able to recover; and to put a stop to their usurpation, is almost to put an end to it. Again; if the appetites be then especially strong, yet their strength is not confirmed by long habit, and therefore this is the time when they should be broken and tamed. If our thoughts and wishes are then afloat, and in the greatest agitation, yet having scarce fallen into a deep track, or wrought out themselves a passage, they may the sooner be derived into a proper channel, and determined to a regular course. For if *the beginning of strife*, and so of any other irregularity, be, as the wise king assures us, *like the letting out of water*, the beginnings of sobriety and conduct must be like the setting banks and piles against a flood, the turning it into a safer current, and saying, *hitherto shalt thou come and no farther, and here shall thy waves be stayed.* And this leads us to a third and very remarkable benefit of a sober mind, that,

3. It is a strong defence against temptations.

For that which exposes us to spiritual danger is, for the most part, a levity of spirit, a rashness of purpose, a confusion and dissipation of thought. And we are so sensible this is our failing, that we are willing to make it our excuse; as believing we cannot mitigate and extenuate a fault more than by alleging, that it was not malice, but incogitancy; not presumption, but infirmity. Now, although the acknowledgment of our folly, for which these are but softer terms, be indeed to be commended as the token of an humble spirit; yet it is infinitely better, by a timely wisdom and true greatness of soul, to have (so far as we may) prevented the occasion of so unfortunate an humility. Indeed, as want of care is observed by a noble writer (Marquis of Halifax) to have the same effect as want of virtue; so want of diligent and sober reflection will have the same effect as want of understanding; it being with the treasures of the mind, as with other riches, he that does not use them wants them. And therefore Solomon has joined together the slothful and the insensible, in that elegant report: *I went by the field of*

the slothful, and the vineyard of the man void of understanding; and lo, it was all grown over with thorns, and nettles had covered the face thereof, and the stone wall thereof was broken down. (Prov. xxiv. 31.)

Where by the field and vineyard, how natural is it to conceive the mind of a young person, chosen out as a fair and lovely soil, fenced about with good instructions, and planted with graces and virtues, as with the choicest vines; yet through the remissness of the possessor, *grown over with thorns, and covered with nettles*, over-run with degenerate habits, and fruitful only in such propensions as are wild and unprofitable, sharp and afflicting? And as to the latter part of the resemblance, *the stone wall thereof was broken down*; how does this represent the open and unguarded condition of such as shall have lost that prudent reserve, and serious caution, with which their mind was fenced and fortified against assaults? Which is more particularly expressed in another sentence of that admirable book: *He that hath no rule over his own spirit, is like a city that is broken down, and without walls.* (Prov. xxv. 28.) On the contrary, a strong city and well ordered garrison are the proper emblems of a sedate and sober mind, which is not only encompassed with walls and bulwarks, with wise maxims and virtuous principles, but where the frequent walkings of the guard or watch, that is, the constant returns of thought, at once secure it against a surprise from without, and put an immediate stop to any disorder or irregularity within. *I have written to you, young men, because ye are strong*, says St. John in the First Epistle; "or what imports the same," says an eloquent divine, (Dean Young,) "because you are vigorous; that is, you are now in such a state of body and soul, and affections, as is most subservient to piety—most quick and governable, and most successfully applied to the offices of duty. Govern therefore your appetites before the evil days come; now you may gird them, and carry them whither you will; but if you neglect the season, they will hereafter gird you, and carry you whither you would not." But if (as seems most probable) the apostle there speaks of the strength of grace against temptations, we

know this is especially promised to those who shall best employ the powers of nature. So that we may understand the passage with respect to both: *I have written to you, young men, because ye are strong, and the word of God abideth in you, and ye have overcome the wicked one.* And after such a victory, who will not concur in the applause of the wise king, and say, that *the glory of young men is their strength*? Whence we may pass to a fourth head, upon which sobriety of mind recommends itself to you:

4. As it affords the greater opportunities of eminent piety and virtue.

For he that is thus armed, is, we see, the fittest and most expedite not for defence only, but for action; so that when occasions present themselves, he is ready to meet them with delight, and improve them to advantage. If called to his devotions, he never brings a sacrifice without a heart; he can the sooner recollect and compose himself, and put his thoughts into a frame becoming the holy duty, *without wrath or doubting*; without levity or vanity, and so far as is possible, without wandering or inadvertency. If he be a person of quality, and resolved not to do like inferior people, then, as it has been well expressed (Counsels of Wisd. Pt. 1.): "Whatever they do well, he does better than they: he does not imitate their piety, but exceeds it: he does not follow them, but considers his dignity, and is the first to lead them: it is thus he keeps his rank and distinction in the church, and none that come there can be more devout or modest than himself."

He gives the same attention to the reading of God's word, as Samuel, even when a child, did to the immediate revelation of it; and answers with like obedience at the call: *Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth.* In the mean while his thoughts enlarge upon that request, and silently put up a prayer, like that ascribed to young Solomon—*I thy servant and son of thy handmaid am a feeble person, and of short time, and too young for the understanding of judgment and laws: give me wisdom that filleth by thy throne, and reject me not from among thy children. O send her out of thy holy heavens, and from the throne of thy glory, that being present she may labour with me, that I may know*

know what is pleasing unto thee. For she knoweth and understanding all things, and she shall lead me soberly in my doings, and preserve me in her power. (Wisd. ix. 4, 5, 10, 11.)

And as the youth of a sober mind is in the best frame and temper for profiting by God's word, so likewise for answering the design, and enjoying the benefit of his sacraments. He considers his baptism not as an empty ceremony, a formal admission into the church, but as an act of a most sacred intention, and most serious importance; by which, like Samuel and St. John Baptist, he was given and dedicated to God, *from his mother's womb*. He esteems himself engaged, in duty and justice, in honour and gratitude, to perform, by the divine assistance, the vows that were made in his name; to *sanctify God in his body, and in his spirit which are God's*; to study his will, whose he is, and whom he serves; to choose that better part of *sitting at our Lord's feet, and hearing his words*, and that nobler character of *searching the scriptures daily*, which he hath known from a child.

The same temper, as it gives him the quickest sense of his frailty, of the sins and offences of his youth, so it puts him upon that ingenuous question of holy David, *Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way?* In answer to which, he remembers that another holy ordinance is provided, to cancel our unhappy transgressions of the former; that another fountain (or rather another stream) is opened in the house of David, and that he who duly and worthily comes to it, shall be clean: so that earnestly desiring, when place and opportunity permit, to be a guest at the holy table, and to take the cup of salvation, he already says in his good resolution, *Behold the servant of the Lord, be it unto me according to thy word.*

If from these institutions and services of piety, we proceed to all the acts and instances of virtue, whether divine or humane, social or private; there is not one that can be assigned in the whole train and concert, for which the sober-minded is not especially prepared, or as the apostle requires in young Timothy, *thoroughly furnished to every good work*. In the performance of generous offices, the composing of differences, the doing

of kindnesses, and the like, where there is not so great an opposition of nature, he yet enjoys so far an advantage above others, as he has not only the desire, but the consideration to acquit himself in these regards. For in these we many times fail, not for want of inclination, but of leisure, not of habitual principles, but of actual application and address; while other engagements or amusements make us lose, by not thinking at present, occasions that are irretrievable by after-thought. And as for such duties as seem more harsh and self-denying, such as patience under trouble, forgiveness of injuries, with others of that order; he is so much the more ready to discharge them, as he hath advanced farther in obtaining the rule over his own spirit, so as less to feel the struggle and reluctance of natural constitution. In a word, he of all persons must be qualified for whatever is good or great; inasmuch as sobriety of mind is, in effect, that mastery over ourselves, that employment of our best faculties about their proper objects, in which consists the duty of this life, and the happiness of the other. Happy then, and in the fairest prospect of being for ever happy, is he, that shall have made the early choice of the wise man.—*When I was young, or ever I went abroad, I desired wisdom in my prayer, my foot went the right way; from my youth up I sought after her, I had my heart joined with her from the beginning.* (Ecclus. li. 13, 14, 15.) Happy indeed, who with better success shall have imitated those characters in the gospel, of the person that had kept the commandments from his youth, whom Jesus beholding, loved him (Mark, x. 21.); and of the other of whom we read, *when Jesus saw that he answered discreetly, he said: Thou art not far from the kingdom of God!* (Mark, xii. 34.)

This was the second part of our undertaking, to represent the benefits and advantages, which sobriety of mind especially affords to young men.

And these were the four great advantages proposed to our distinct inquiry and consideration. I will subjoin more briefly a few other motives to the same excellent temper, and so conclude.

Now here I might allege the dignity it gives your person, the grace and comeliness with which it adorns your behaviour,

viour, the force and weight it adds to your converse, the assistance it affords you in your business and profession, the sweetness it supplies to your innocent diversions, the sure ground and basis it lays for your reputation and esteem, the service it contributes to your health and safety, or the advantage of the sound mind to the sound body.

Again, as *the glory of young men is their strength*, in another meaning than what was before intimated, I might urge the benefit of this noble temper, in respect of courage, or bravery, which belongs to the genius of our nation, and in which it now triumphs. I might observe, that this only can inspire a man with deliberate valour, in martial enterprizes, and deeds of arms: inasmuch as courage, if precipitate or enthusiastic, is not courage, but cowardice enraged. I might assert, that he only is the true hero, who is so in a just cause, and upon good and serious principles; because nothing else can give him an intrepidity of soul, and clearness of thought, in the point of danger, or in the article of death. And even this part of the heroic character never shines so bright as when attended with the other part; or when the highest degree of temperance is in conjunction with the highest degree of fortitude and gallantry. As both these are built upon a presence of mind, so you remember that an inimitable writer of our country has united them in a royal and truly Christian hero, and describing the prince, has anticipated the martyr:

———In danger mov'd no more,
Than with the pleasures of the court before.

WALLER.

And farther, I might set before you some of the chief examples of an early piety and prudence recorded in sacred history: I might attempt to draw those illustrious and lovely characters of young Joseph, of Moses, of Daniel, and his companions; to excite your generous emulation, and to shew that a strange country is in an especial manner the scene designed by Providence, for the trial of the best and noblest youths; that, being tried, they may be *found faithful, and worthy to sit in their fathers' seat*.

And as *the glory of children are their fathers*, and as obedient children, and wise sons, make a grateful and honourable return, in adding to their fathers glory; I might hence raise the ambition of those, whose fathers or ancestors, (with other lights and ornaments of their families, direct or collateral,) by their piety and learning, their wisdom and justice, their courage and resolution, have merited places of high distinction in sacred or civil honour. So that you should seem to need no other admonition, than that most agreeable one of praise and commemoration: *Let us now praise famous men; such as did bear rule in the kingdom, renowned for their power, giving counsel by their understanding; leaders of the people by their counsels, and by their knowledge of learning meet for the people, wise and eloquent in their instructions. All these were honoured in their generations, and were the glory of their times. With their seed shall continually remain a good inheritance, and their children are within the covenant.* (Ecclus. xlv.)

When upon these and other topics, I had exhorted you to be sober-minded, I might desire you at present to exercise that sobriety, in *suffering the word of exhortation*, especially since it does not take its weight from the sermon, but the text; nor from the immediate speaker, but from the first author and instructor, whose character is incontestible, being (to use his own terms) *such an one as Paul the aged, the minister and ambassador, the prisoner and martyr, of Jesus Christ*.

To supply these several arguments, or heads of discourse, and at the same time to press you with an authority that bears a nearer proportion and resemblance to that of an apostle, I shall recite to you a passage of a late most reverend and venerable preacher, in his sermons, Of the Advantages of an early Piety: "As (says he) there is joy in heaven at the conversion of a great and old sinner, so it cannot but be a very delightful spectacle to God and angels, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, to see a young person besieged by powerful temptations on every side, to acquit himself gloriously and resolutely, to hold out against the most violent assaults: to behold one in the pride and flower of his age, that is courted by pleasures

“ pleasures and honours, by the devil
 “ and all the bewitching vanities of this
 “ world, to reject all these, and to cleave
 “ stedfastly to God; nay, to frown upon
 “ all these temptations, and to look down
 “ upon them with indignation and scorn,
 “ and to say, let those dote upon these
 “ things who know no better; let them
 “ adore sensual pleasures, and lying vanities,
 “ who are ignorant of the sincere
 “ and solid pleasures of religion and
 “ virtue; let them run into the arms of
 “ temptation, who can forget God their
 “ creator and preserver, and the guide of
 “ youth: as for me, I will serve the
 “ Lord, and will employ my whole time
 “ either innocently or usefully, in serving
 “ God, and doing good unto men, who
 “ are made after the image of God.”

This I am persuaded is the wish and resolution of you all, to which I presume to add nothing but my own affectionate wishes for its success in your happiness; that *the blessing of your fathers may, if possible, prevail above the blessings of their progenitors*; (Gen. xlix.) that *the blessings of Heaven above, the blessings of the deep beneath, the precious things of the earth, with the fullness thereof, may come upon the head of so many Josephs, so many that are separated from their brethren*: and that the separation, or removal, of those who are most distinguished, may be, as his was, not only for the advancement of themselves in knowledge and virtue, in honour and greatness, not only for the service and support of their own family, but of whole nations, and of the true religion.

In a word; I shut up this imperfect discourse, as the wise son of Sirach does his accomplished book:

Let your soul rejoice in God's mercy, and be not ashamed of his praise: work your work betimes, and in his time he will give you your reward.

S E R M O N LXXVIII.

By the Rev. DANIEL BELLAMY, A. M.

The Danger and Folly of Practical Atheism.

PSALM xiv. latter part of ver. 1.

They are corrupt; they have done abominable works; there is none that doeth good.

THE whole verse runs thus: *The fool hath said in his heart, there is no God: they are corrupt; they have done abominable works; there is none that doeth good.* The psalmist having in the beginning of this verse asserted, that there were men so blind and foolish, as to deny the being of a God, tells us, in the latter part, what sort of men those were: *They were corrupt; they had done abominable works; there were none that did good.* The paraphrase of this verse may run thus: “ This wicked nation (speaking of the
 “ Jews) is now made up of such, as
 “ have cast off all fear, and care, and
 “ even acknowledgment of God: what-
 “ soever they do with their mouths,
 “ which perhaps are not let loose to that
 “ boldness, their actions, as far as they
 “ are interpreters of their thoughts, evi-
 “ dence an atheistical principle of belief
 “ within them, that God hath not the
 “ governing and judging of the doings
 “ of men; for such are their dealings,
 “ so false, so detestable, and so universally
 “ such, that a man cannot judge more
 “ favourably of them, than that they
 “ never expect to be accountable to God
 “ for what they do.” Or, in more direct terms, that they persuade themselves that there is no God to call them to account. *The fool hath said in his heart, there is no God: they are corrupt; they have done abominable works; there is none that doeth good.*

In a preceding discourse, on the former part of this verse, I proved, I hope, to the conviction of my hearers, that there is a Supreme Being; it may not be an improper sequel therefore to shew, that all such, as are corrupt, as indulge themselves in all manner of licentiousness, are at least equally bad, if not worse than those who openly deny the existence of a God; since the actions of such men

bring a reproof upon the religion they profess, whatever it be. If the speculative atheist is a most despicable creature, the practical one is doubtless worse: the former dishonours God with his mouth; the latter, with all the powers and faculties of his soul and body. But before I proceed, it may be necessary to explain what I mean by the practical atheist; for it is possible, some may cavil at the term, as not corresponding, with sufficient aptness, in every respect, to the person whose folly, or rather madness, I am about to expose.

The practical atheist then is one who, although he may possibly profess the belief of a God, and some other general truths, which are the natural result of such a declaration, yet gives a loose to his inordinate lusts and passions, and lives in the constant breach of almost every commandment: in short, we may rank under this denomination every one, who lives in an uninterrupted course of sin and impiety; for such men could never live as they do, did they in reality believe; and that they do not believe, is principally owing to their want of reflection. These will oftentimes attend the public worship, it is true; but then they look upon it as a matter of form only, where they pray without either hope or fear; and should they chance to hear their character, and their deplorable state and condition, described in the most pathetic terms; their danger made ever so apparent; eternal happiness or eternal misery proposed to them with the warmest zeal; they will cry with a smile perhaps, "A mighty good discourse!" but, at the same time, determine with themselves to reap no advantage from it. If we may pass any judgment from the conduct of mankind in general, but very few, I fear, will escape this censure. Let us look round about us, and what does the gloomy prospect afford, but murders, adulteries, blasphemies, thefts, and such a black catalogue of crimes, as, when set in their proper light, would make any sober and serious Christian shudder with horror, and almost wish to lead the life of an anchorite, rather than mingle with such an abandoned herd? I am not insensible, that remonstrances of this kind are deemed things of course from the pulpit, and, as such, too little regarded; but every one, who is not wilfully blind, must be con-

vinced of the truth of them. And though we should allow, that the generality of mankind are not guilty of what we call enormous crimes, yet how few are there, who walk with delight in the paths of virtue! Where shall we find the man, that is wholly devoted to the service of his Maker? One, that is no ways addicted to the reigning vices of the age; that is truly just and honest in all his dealings; that abhors tyranny and oppression, and scorns to take advantage of his neighbour's necessity, or, for any consideration whatsoever, to defraud him of his due; who, in short, in every action of his life, will do that to others which he would be desirous they should do to him? I am afraid there are very few such righteous persons to be found; and would to God, this were only a bare suspicion! But I am apt to believe, that our own consciences would accuse the greatest part of us; at least each one in his heart would condemn his neighbour. Could this be the real state of things, did men sincerely believe the truth of their most holy religion? I think they could not; it is our indispensable duty, therefore, though experience shews how little success we meet with in such attempts, to hold a glass to men's consciences, and shew them the deformity of their souls, and the danger of that everlasting perdition which lies before them. Had we no more to do, than to tell men what is their duty, the task would not be hard; for the sacred scriptures are very clear and obvious in that particular; but to persuade men to follow, with a willing mind, those unerring guides, is an attempt, I fear, too arduous and difficult to be accomplished: should our utmost endeavours, however, but call one sinner to repentance, we shall not lose our reward.

That I may contribute what little is in my power towards the attainment of so valuable an end, I shall beg your serious attention, whilst I lay before you, not only the hazard, but the folly of practical atheism.

Though every one here present will, I doubt not, very readily declare, that he believes there is a God, who will hereafter reward the just, and punish the wicked; yet upon a strict examination, it is to be feared, that too many will find, they only say so, because they have been accustomed to such a concession from
their

their infancy; and that bare acknowledgment has been all; for perhaps they never bestowed one serious thought about it; and, as they imbibed those notions upon the credit of others, never gave themselves the trouble to examine into the truth or falsehood of them; but sitting down contented with passing for nominal Christians, pursue their vices without the least reluctance or controul; and whether they shall live hereafter, or not, and how it will fare with them when this world shall pass away, are articles which they never concerned themselves about. Now, can any man be said properly to believe a thing of which he has only heard some imperfect account, and that too with so much coldness and indifference, as not to think it worth his care to inquire into the reality of the fact? No, surely! for to believe, we must have all the evidence that the nature of the thing will bear: it is no unnatural assertion therefore, to say, that the true reason why men do not reform their lives, is, because their belief is unsettled: for is it credible, that such numbers could have the least apprehension of leaving this world in a few years, for a state of the most consummate misery, and yet be easy, whilst they are running headlong into so deplorable a state? I would ask any man, did he believe that the house he lived in would, in a few years, be consumed by fire, and that he should inevitably perish in the flames, unless he was continually upon his guard, and used his utmost endeavours to prevent such a misfortune, whether this would not make him for ever uneasy? Whether he would not exert himself to the last degree, in hopes to avoid so deplorable a fate? And whether he would not esteem that person as his dearest friend, who should point out to him an infallible method to preserve him from such destruction? If then the greatest care is thought too little to secure us from temporal calamities, how much more will the sincere believer do to screen himself from the wrath of an offended and almighty God? It is therefore plain to me, and must, upon the least consideration, be so to every one, that either those, who live in a constant course of sin, do not believe; or else, that they must be to the last degree presumptuous, mad, and foolish. Now I am charitable enough to think, that the want of con-

sideration is the principal cause, and the best reason that can be given, why so many in these times fall into practical atheism. I would therefore advise such a set of unthinking men to recollect, that their security and ease will never quench the torments of hell; and as a very little reflection will convince them that there is such a place, they will experience the intolerable pains of it, when it is too late to repent: and if a severe fit of the gout, or stone, be such agonizing pain; if poverty and contempt prove such insupportable burthens, that men have preferred death, with all its horrors, rather than endure them; think, oh! timely think! what torments the wrath of a justly offended God will produce!

As a convincing proof of the truth of these reflections, let us look back to the infancy of Christianity, and we shall find almost incredible numbers, so firmly persuaded of the being of a God, as to forego, not only all the alluring pleasures that the whole world could afford them, but life itself, with the nobler prospect of an ever-blessed immortality. These Christian heroes, before their conversion, reflected as little, perhaps, on a future state, and were as remiss, as the generality of mankind are at present; but truth is so prevailing, that we need only shew it, in order to convince the most obdurate. Now, what exalted ideas of God's goodness, and awful fears of his displeasure, must possess the souls of those, who, to purchase his favour, patiently endured the severest tortures that the cruelty of man could possibly devise; who, when they were beheaded, burnt, flead, or sawn asunder, rejoiced that they were thought worthy to suffer. These considerations, duly weighed, will surely rouse us from our lethargy; and, as they so nearly concern us, must undoubtedly prompt us to examine whether they be true or false; and, I am fully persuaded, if once we set heartily about such an important inquiry, and use all possible means to succeed in it, we shall first of all be convinced of our danger; and then, unless we are stupid and insensible to the last degree, shall cry out as the converts of old did to the apostles, *Sirs, what must we do to be saved?* (Acts, xvi. 3.)

I hope the few cursory reflections which I have offered to you at this time, are sufficient to convince you of the

danger and folly of practical atheism; I propose therefore, in the next place, to inquire how it happens, that men are so careless and remiss in a point of such importance, and where their future felicity is so nearly concerned. The source of this unhappy security and indolence, in affairs relating to another world, I take to be the little care which parents and masters take to instil betimes into the minds of youth the principles of their most holy religion. I shall therefore beg leave to make a few reflections on this subject, and shew the ill consequences, both as to their spiritual and temporal welfare, that attend such a shameful neglect.

I shall then (by way of application) represent to you the anguish and remorse which the practical atheist must experience, when overtaken by a violent fit of sickness, or overwhelmed with the infirmities of old age; and, on the other hand, the joy which the virtuous man possesses in the last stage of his life, when he finds death making his gentle approaches towards him.

To begin with the source, or first cause of practical atheism, I mean the mistakes into which too many run, with regard to the education of their children.

Before I enter upon this article, I think it necessary to premise, that I have no intention to instruct those, who make it their delight, as well as profession, to train up youth in the paths of virtue; especially those, whose years and experience render such an attempt not only needless, but impertinent; on the contrary, I should rejoice to receive information from them; and indeed I have heard some of them discourse on this topic to my no small satisfaction and advantage. What I have to offer at this time will consist chiefly of a few general observations, in which I shall address myself in a more particular manner to parents; since the negligence of such near relations may render the labours even of the most skilful masters ineffectual.

He, who has the welfare of his child at heart, will not think all the pains he can possibly take, in order to procure any valuable blessing for him, too great. The most profligate and abandoned seldom are insensible of that tenderness for their offspring, which the infinite wisdom of God has so strongly impressed

upon the heart of man. I would therefore offer the following reflections to the consideration of those who have the least regard for the present or future happiness of their children.

Every one must allow, that the prejudices we imbibe, or the evil habits we contract, in our infancy, and younger years, are very difficult at least, if not impossible, to remove; that those who have had the happiness of a virtuous and liberal education, though they should for a time be carried away by the fire of youth, or the violence of any temptation, yet they very seldom continue long in so unfortunate a course; the virtuous principles they received in their childhood will, in every sober hour, revive and reproach them, as it were, for their ill conduct; and it has been often observed, that, after a short struggle, virtue has gained the victory, and they have followed her paths with more eagerness and delight than ever. On the other hand, those whose parents have not only neglected them in their early days, but by their own bad examples have encouraged and cherished their dispositions to evil; if ever it should so happen, as I believe it very rarely does, that they are awakened to a sense of their danger, and resolve to seek the ways of wisdom and truth; how hard is the conflict! how liable are they to be overcome by every temptation that is laid before them! I might likewise add, that since man's unhappy fall, we are by nature more prone to vice than virtue. Parents therefore ought to undertake the task of forming the minds of their children betimes; their care ought to begin at the very cradle, or, at least, as soon as they are capable of making any reflections.

We very justly call those times when the light of the gospel was hid from the world, the days of ignorance and darkness; and we may with great reason rejoice in so invaluable a blessing as the knowledge of the true God, and the certain methods of attaining his favour, and thereby procuring to ourselves an heavenly inheritance. We can likewise add to these privileges the most perfect morality, and the best rules for the direction of our conduct throughout the whole course of our lives: we have not only the advantage of the labours of all the philosophers, but their

their errors and mistakes amended, and such improvements, as all their boasted wisdom could never attain. Since this is the case, and since we have so many helps and guides, which they wanted, would it not be the greatest disgrace imaginable to us, should we yield to them either in wisdom, prudence, or virtue? Should we not, on the contrary, be stirred up to imitate, to excel them in every praiseworthy undertaking? It may be no unprofitable amusement therefore, in this place, to give Christian parents a transient view of the more than common pains which the heathens themselves took in so important an affair, as the regulation of their children.

Their first concern was to procure such servants for their attendants, as were esteemed persons of sobriety and good morals. They looked upon the neglect of parents to preserve and cultivate in their children the inestimable treasure of modesty, as the origin of all disorders. That soft and effeminate method of education, which too many are fond of, they despised, since it only tends to enervate at once both the body and the mind. They gave a severe check to all idle and loose discourse, and suffered no bad examples to be set before them, lest, being habituated to such sights, they should lose that abhorrence of vice, which should be implanted in them, and contract ill habits before experience could evince the danger that attended them. They took great pains to subdue their passions betimes, and made every thing subservient to the promotion of virtue. Instead of light and trivial sentences, none were offered for their imitation, but such as contained some moral precept, and the sayings of the wisest men were taught them by way of amusement; and this method was the rather observed, because the memory easily retains such lessons of instruction, and the good effects of them often extend even to old age. They were likewise shewn in their infancy the benefits and pleasures of temperance; and the noblest families were solicitous to have their children betimes inured to hardships and fatigues. They were industrious to instil into them an early veneration for truth: a lie was deemed most odious, and a fraud, however dexterously managed, looked upon as a black and enormous crime. Their aversion to all kinds of intemperance was

no less remarkable; they exposed their slaves, when disguised by liquor, to the derision of their youth, in order to implant in them an early detestation of that vice. The food allowed to their children and young men, was nothing but bread, cresses, and water, to accustom them to abstinence and sobriety: they considered, that a plain, frugal diet would invigorate the body, and cause them to be sprightly and healthful. Boys were not only instructed, whilst at school, in the arts and sciences, but in the principles of justice and virtue; even there they learned to reverence the gods; to be obedient to their parents and superiors; and no crime was so severely punished among them, as ingratitude. It would take up much more time than is allowed me at present, to enumerate the various methods the heathens took to form such a number of brave soldiers, worthy citizens, and venerable philosophers.

Notwithstanding these eulogiums have so specious an appearance, I might be thought too partial to them, were I to omit observing, that, when we come to set their views in a fair and impartial light, we shall find, that their virtues were the result only of ambition, and that they looked chiefly for their reward in this world. If then such narrow motives had such glorious consequences; if sobriety, temperance, chastity, generosity, prudence, and humility, were so diligently cultivated, even by those who had little expectations from another life; if they profited so largely under their philosophers and teachers, whose very knowledge was dark and confused; what ought not to be expected from us, who have the most perfect morality, the most divine precepts, and the ever-glorious example of our blessed Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ? What fruits ought we to produce, who expect so glorious an harvest in another world, as is promised in the sacred scriptures; and moreover have our knowledge enlightened by the inexpressible brightness of the gospel? Who that hears what advantages we have over them, would not readily conclude, we must excel those admired heathens in the purity of our lives and conversations? Who, that sees our daily practices, would not readily allow, they would be a scandal to the darkest ages of idolatry and ignorance?

From

From what has been said, it very naturally follows, that we return to the subject we set out with, namely, the source of this ill behaviour amongst men who profess and call themselves Christians.

Not to dissemble the matter therefore, the strange neglect of parents is the first, if not the only cause of these evils. How common is it for them to indulge their children in every kind of pleasure; to talk, without reserve, and perhaps wickedly too, before them on any subject; to shew a sort of contempt for religious mysteries; to be drunken in their presence? And, if all this doth not happen, how few take the necessary precautions to instil into their minds betimes the principles of virtue and religion? How many, on the contrary, are fond of cherishing in them the seeds of vice and folly? Evils of this kind are so common, that I may leave it to every man's conscience to tell him how blame-worthy he has been in this particular, and hasten to shew the fatal consequences of such wrong proceedings. Can we wonder, if children, who have been inured to hear, not only religion itself, but its votaries, and their places of divine worship, treated with indifference, and perhaps with contempt, should be attached to all sensual enjoyments? Can we be surprised, if they become wine-bibbers and profane swearers, when they have always had such bad examples before their eyes? On the contrary, would it not be a matter of wonder should they prove otherwise? Can we expect a plentiful harvest, when we have neglected to cultivate our grounds? Have we any reason to hope for delicious fruits, where we have only sown thorns and briars? Should we not think him a fool or a madman that attempts to raise a noble and spacious edifice on a rotten or sandy foundation? And is it less absurd, to expect a youth to be virtuous, who has been early instructed in the paths of vice? Is it any longer therefore a matter of astonishment, that men should be practical atheists, who never have been taught to think seriously on that awful Being, who made heaven and earth? Why should we think it strange, that they should call themselves Christians, though their daily practices most notoriously give the lie to their profession; since their fathers bore that denomination, and yet led as abandoned lives as themselves? or say they

did not; yet they taught them but little more of their religion, than formally to say that they believed. They have been accustomed moreover to see their neighbours round about them practise the same easy religion; and it is possible they would be ashamed to be even thought less daring, or more religious, than their indolent elders. What shall we say? When men are thus grown up, and confirmed in this unhappy security, and their understandings perhaps upon a level with their education, it is no wonder, if any arguments, how weak soever, will have weight enough to persuade them, that God will not call them to account for this abominable luke-warmness: but should their practices, as is too often the case, be extremely wicked and unjust, they will then be inclined to hope, that there is no God. And surely, no state on earth can be more miserable than his who has lived to fear there is a God; to dread there may be torments, and to hope that those inexpressible joys, which the gospel promises, are only fond chimeras.

That few give themselves any real concern about their immortal souls, is a very melancholy but incontestible truth. Vice, indeed, has at all times had her votaries; but now she almost seems to dispute the government of the world with virtue. I appeal to those, who have made any observation of these things, and more especially to the elderly part of my congregation; was ever luxury carried to such an amazing pitch as it is at present? Are not men's minds enervated with a love of ease and pleasure? Did ever men so openly and audaciously practise vice and immorality? Were there ever known such numbers of atheists and unbelievers? If then vice seems at these times so formidable, what a prospect do the times to come afford? What devils do those promise to be, who now are children? since, in their infant years, every town, every street, and almost every house, is witness of their blaspheming the name of God, and invoking the powers of hell in curses upon themselves and their companions. You all know this to be truth; ye cannot chuse, but hear them before your doors, in your markets, and even in your very churches. Ye parents! ye masters! it is your neglect that is the fatal cause of all these evils; evils which children yet unborn will have reason to lament. If
therefore

therefore you have any desire of praise, any hopes of contentment here, or happiness hereafter; if you have any regard for the honour of your native country, or the least bowels of compassion for your yet innocent children; think on these things: take the utmost care to train them up to virtue; to cherish every generous sentiment, and raise in them an ardent zeal for the glory of God, and our most holy religion. As none are without, let me beg of you industriously to conceal your own failings, lest your children also fall; for this, if it can be called one, is a commendable and praise-worthy deceit: the more virtuous they believe you to be, the more respect and tenderness you will experience from them. As a farther motive for your being active in the reformation of the youth entrusted to your care; it may be worth your while to consider, that you are laying up for yourselves joy and comfort even in this world, and procuring for posterity invaluable advantages: for surely no blessing can be greater to private persons, than dutiful and virtuous children; no advantage more solid to any nation or community, than a succession of virtuous members.

Though I have been purposely very short in the pursuit of my subject, namely, the danger and folly of practical atheism, yet I hope I have said enough to convince any one, first, that there are infinite numbers so unhappy, as to be wholly incurious and indifferent about the truth or falsehood of the religion they profess. Secondly, that their indolence will not prevent their being eternally miserable; and that, unless they diligently seek the Lord, they may expect to feel the weight of his just resentment and displeasure. Thirdly, that so many would not have fallen into this dreadful mistake, had their parents taken a proper care of their education. Fourthly, that the heathens were very industrious to cherish every virtue in their children; and that therefore more is required from the Christian, because he has greater advantages, far better lessons of instruction, and more glorious views, namely, the light of the sacred scriptures, and the joys of heaven. And lastly, I shewed how few seriously consider these things, and the ill consequences that attended such a neglect; concluding with some arguments in order to persuade every one to make a reformation at home. It

now remains, by way of application, that I represent to you the anguish and remorse which the practical atheist must experience in a violent fit of sickness; or, if he lives long enough, in the sorrow and infirmities of old age. And, on the contrary, the joy the virtuous man possesses in the latter stages of his life, or when he finds death making his gentle approaches.

Human nature is subject to so many accidents and misfortunes, that it has been very justly insisted upon, that no man was ever completely happy in this life. But surely the reflections which will per-force obtrude upon a wicked man, when sorely oppressed, and conscious that his own ill conduct has brought his misfortunes upon him, will make the weight of them more intolerable. Image to yourselves a man weakened by intemperance, reduced almost to the last extremity, one who feels the violent burning of a dis-tempered blood, who imagines himself upon the brink of the grave, and going to experience the wrath of a God, whose laws he has violated and despised. At such a time as this, conscience will be heard, and his crimes will then appear in their true light. Every thing about him will then turn to his disquiet; he will perhaps observe his friends look with unconcern for his sufferings; he is conscious how undeserving he has been, and therefore is not the last to discover what a secret joy dawns in every face, proceeding from the hopes that they are soon to be freed from a wretch whose ill conduct has involved them in many troubles. His children, whose education, it is most probable, has been suited to their father's morals, or, at least, upon whom his bad example has had too melancholy an effect, see the condition to which he is reduced with pleasure; forasmuch as wicked and licentious minds have very few touches of humanity. How uneasy must such his temporal condition make him? Every thing that can happen appears in the worst light to him at one view; his relations and neighbours despising his memory, and rejoicing at his death; his children sharing his fortunes, as it were the spoils of some enemy, and rioting even over his grave:—natural affection too will perhaps point out to him, that his false indulgence, his pernicious counsels, and more especially his bad example, has procured the ruin, the eternal ruin, of those whose welfare

ought

ought to have been his chief concern. We find the rich man in hell, according to the parable, sensible, when too late, of this evil, and intreating Abraham to prevent his brethren from falling into the same dreadful judgment as himself. The same remorse may seize the wicked man on this side his death; and how great will his disquiet be, in that he was not sensible of his fatal conduct, till the time was at hand, when it was too late to apply a remedy. If then these his earthly affairs will at such a time be so irksome and grievous to him, what must the prospect of eternity afford him?—Intolerable punishments; unspeakable torments; an offended and avenging God; all crowd upon his soul, and give him up a prey to the most dreadful despair. Though these things are too shocking to be thought of, yet, that they are the most sure consequences of vice, all must be sensible, who have ever attended the last hours of the wicked. How great are their agonies? How inexpressible the gloomy thoughts that crowd upon them? How often do we hear them, in the bitterness of their souls, cry out—There is no mercy for me!—God hath forsaken me!—He will not hear!—The torments of hell are preparing for me!—I feel there is a God!—I shall soon be driven into intolerable torments!—Such exclamations are not uncommon upon a sick bed; and it is wonderful, the standers-by should not be more deeply affected with them than they generally are. But you will say, perhaps, this is only the case with the desperately wicked; we have never been guilty of crimes black enough to occasion such deep despair. Ah! let not such a flattering notion lull your souls in deep security: it is not enough we are not wicked; if we hope for life and happiness, we must be virtuous. It is not enough, that, with a cold air and indifference, we attend the church of God; but we must likewise diligently practise his commandments, and seek him with zeal and warmth; or else we may fatally feel the terrors of his wrath. Remember! he not only punishes the workers of iniquity, but has himself assured us, that the slothful servant shall be hurried to dreadful darkness, *where will be weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth* (Matt. xiii. 42.)

But say, should the wicked, the careless sinner, live to grow old in his mercy.

years, what child reveres him? With how much contempt is he treated even by his wicked companions? Who covets his friendship? Who does not despise his company? A foolish old man is certainly a most contemptible creature, but a wicked one is the shame of mankind. How ill suits all manner of intemperance with age? Such behaviour will stifle all kindness in friends, charity in neighbours, and duty in children: he falls into the grave, and, it is to be feared, into eternal torment too, unpitied and despised; and the greatest happiness that could befall such a man would be to perish like the brutes, and have his very name buried in oblivion.

How different is the fate of the wise and virtuous man? His children regard him, as their dearest benefactor, their truest friend; they are ready to assist him with all the cheerfulness imaginable, and try every expedient in their power to prolong his life, and render it pleasant and agreeable. His neighbours court his acquaintance, rejoice in the prosperity of his family, and are ready to testify upon all occasions their approbation of his conduct. Virtue adds such an inexpressible sweetness to old age, that no state of life, in my opinion, ought so much to be envied. But, to proceed; when that life, which he has so happily prolonged by his temperance and sobriety, is so far weakened, as to warn him of his approaching dissolution; how calmly does he wait the Almighty's pleasure? His soul being secure in the gracious promises of the gospel, the nearer she approaches the borders of death, is the more eager for immortality, and feels the greater longings after happiness: at the hour of death, he resigns this transitory world with delight, and his soul, full of the awful ideas of God's justice, with the strongest assurances of his inexpressible mercy and goodness, sinks calmly into everlasting bliss.

To conclude, let us all, not only agree in the truth of these things, but seriously resolve to make a diligent inquiry after eternal happiness, and pray incessantly the Almighty to give success to our endeavours. Let us shew that we believe, by our works; and, as a very little consideration will assure us there is a Supreme Being, let us act as those who fear his displeasure, dread his wrath, and trust only in his mercy.

224. K. 4

To Him, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, be ascribed, as is most due, all honour, might, majesty, and dominion, both now and for ever. Amen.

SERMON LXXIX.

By the Rev. W. WEBSTER, D.D.

Of Ware, in Hertfordshire.

The one Thing needful.

LUKE, X. 42.

But one thing is needful.

THOUGH the occasion of these words was particular, the instruction intended to be conveyed by them is general, viz. that religion, and the security of our future happiness, ought to be our grand business and concern in this life; that they are, in their importance, so infinitely superior to all other considerations, that our Saviour styles them the *one thing needful*; nothing else, when compared with them, being of any moment at all: as the longest period of time is swallowed up in the immeasurable abyss of eternity, like a drop of water in the largest ocean. This momentous and awful truth I purpose to make the subject of my present discourse.

But, why so much pains to prove what no man in his senses will offer to deny? Evident as this truth is, when considered, it is as evident that very few consider it, so as to give it its proper influence upon their conduct; and therefore the most learned, the most knowing, the most religious, may be the better for admonition, when they stand in no need of instruction. Let not any one then, be his parts and attainments ever so great, disdain to read a plain discourse. Plain, as I intend to make it, I hope, by the grace of God assisting me, to make it so clear and strong, that it shall be the reader's fault if he be not the better for it. I do presume it will be allowed me that there is such a thing as wisdom and folly; that there are certain maxims and rules of conduct, which are established by the universal consent and practice of mankind, in respect to their worldly concerns. Upon these maxims I purpose to argue with you; and if they have any force, when applied

to your conduct in the affairs of this life, they must hold much stronger when applied to the concerns of a future state, where our happiness, or misery, will be greater and more lasting, eternal and inconceivable. In my further discourse upon this subject, I shall address myself to four different sorts of people:

Ist, To those who pretend to disbelieve the great truths of religion upon full conviction, after a diligent and impartial examination of the evidence on both sides of the question.

IIdly, To those who only entertain some doubts about it.

IIIdly, To those who never give themselves any concern about the matter.

IVthly, To those who profess a thorough belief of them.

Ist, I shall in the first place address myself to those unhappy persons who pretend to disbelieve the great truths of religion, upon full conviction, after a diligent and impartial examination of the evidence on both sides of the question. I say, who pretend to do so; for I am fully satisfied that out of the number of those, who profess themselves such settled infidels, there are very few that are really such. One, I knew, who died as determined as he lived; but that Collins and Toland did not, I have good reasons to believe. Neither do I think that there ever was an infidel who had examined the evidence on both sides of the question, with diligence and impartiality. They may have taken a good deal of pains to inquire into the arguments; but then it has been with an intent to find objections, not to receive information. They brought strong prejudices and prepossessions with them, imbibed early by the means of bad company or bad books; or else arising from the inconsistency of religious truths with the indulgence of some favourite vice which they were determined not to part with. But if they would act rationally, they must attend to the evidence without any bias from an inclination to infidelity; for if they wish that religion may not appear to be true, like the jaundice that gives a false colour to every object, such an inclination will certainly hinder the mind from seeing any argument in its proper light. But is this acting wisely in a matter of such infinite moment? For our inclinations cannot alter the nature and force of arguments.

Religion

Religion will not be the less true for our wishing that it were not so. But I will venture to affirm, that, in the nature of things, it is utterly impossible that any man can have sufficient evidence upon which he may build a rational firm conviction, that what we call the great truths of religion, the existence of a God, a providence, and a state of happiness or misery in another life, are fictions. On the side of infidelity there can be no direct evidence at all, since no man can demonstrate that the supposition of a God, a providence, and a future state, is absurd and impossible. Neither is it any absurdity, or contradiction to the nature of things, to suppose that there may be a revelation. All that any sensible infidel can say is, that there is not sufficient evidence, upon which we may build a full and clear conviction of the truth of these grand points; there can be, as I said, no direct proof on the other side of the question. This naturally leads me,

Idly, To apply myself to those who are in doubt about these great truths. For argument's sake, I will suppose, that the truths do not appear quite satisfactory; yet, if they carry any degree of credibility with them, we ought, in common sense, to act as if there was a moral certainty of their being true. I would ask these doubters, how they would think it prudent to act under such a state of uncertainty, with regard to their present happiness. I will state the matter as strongly in favour of infidelity and irreligion as I possibly can, by supposing (what every one knows to be false) the practice of religion and virtue to be always attended with an uninterrupted series of self-denial and mortification, with every sort and degree of evil which human nature is capable of suffering in this life; and that a vicious course of life is as uniformly accompanied with every sort and degree of happiness that human nature is capable of enjoying. Now, let us suppose, that if the former has the patience to persevere in the practice of religion and virtue, for one week, under such hard circumstances, he has a chance (let the chance be as low as can be imagined) of being rewarded, at the end of this short period of time, with an uninterrupted series of the most consummate happiness that human nature is capable of enjoying for ten thousand years; in a country the most delightful

that can be conceived, and abounding with the greatest plenty of the most valuable and agreeable products; and constantly enjoying them with the keenest appetite, in company with the most instructive and agreeable companions, always studying how to please and serve one another. Let us again suppose, that the vicious man stands the same chance of his being punished for his poor week's enjoyment, with every sort and degree of misery that human nature is capable of feeling for ten thousand years; living in a barren country, that does not afford one agreeable object to please the eyes, but is full of frightful scenes, of storms and tempests; tormented with appetites that he cannot gratify, in company with the most disagreeable persons, whose only music is the sound of curses, whose only delight is to give uneasiness to one another, and in utter despair of having their condition mended.

I have put a very fair case; and if there be such a thing as common sense, I appeal to it for an answer. Would not any man of the lowest share of understanding, would not any one but a downright madman or idiot suffer such a short-lived misery for the lowest chance of such a noble prize? Or what could be thought of him, who, for the sake of a week's enjoyment, would run the least hazard of being so completely miserable for so long a period of time as ten thousand years? And does the longest life of man on earth bear as great a proportion to eternity, as a week does to ten thousand years? No; the longest period of time bears no proportion at all to eternity. A duration that is not in the power of numbers to measure. O! vast eternity! how dost thou swallow up our thoughts, and fill us at once with delight and amazement. Thou art like the sight of God, so dreadful, that it is difficult for mortal man to look on thee attentively and live. And if the bare conception of eternity be so affecting, how will you be shocked if you add the idea of misery to eternity! Should we form to ourselves the imagination of immediately becoming miserable without intermission and without hope, during our whole life, the very thought would make us turn pale and tremble. Extend your apprehension to the age of Methuselah; then add a million of ages; go on to multiply the product of that sum

by

by as many millions as figures can express; and then think, if you can bear the thought, that after the expiration of this long, long period, you will be no nearer the end of your misery than you was at the beginning of it. O eternity! What art thou! Where am I! I am lost. My head swims, and I grow giddy. Do thou, O blessed Jesus, strengthen my labouring mind. I faint, I sink, do thou support my spirits. Let me, then, thou sceptic, beseech thee to act like a man, like a rational creature. I defy thee, with all thy boasted reasoning, to demonstrate that thou shalt not be eternally happy or eternally miserable, in another life, according as thou demeanest thyself in this. And does not the consideration of the infinite difference between time and eternity make it a point of the greatest wisdom to act upon much less evidence than we have for these truths. For, in matters of such unspeakably great importance, it concerns us always to be on the surest side, where we venture least, if we should happen to be mistaken. And which is the surest side; to believe or disbelieve Christianity, and such a state of future rewards and punishments as are the sanctions of it? If Christianity be true, (and they cannot disprove the truth of it,) and there be an eternal state of rewards and punishments inconceivably great, we are undone for ever; but if we do believe it, and live up to its precepts, we lose nothing by it but the transient pleasures of sin, and instead of them we have the joyfullest hopes; which to a good man are more ravishing and transporting than any of the enjoyments of this world can give to the wicked. In short, the miseries denounced against unbelievers are so very terrible that no thinking man in his senses would run the least hazard of them; but, instead of demanding demonstration of there being such a place of exquisite torment, would demand demonstrative certainty, that there is not, before he would venture: and the happiness promised to good Christians so far exceeds our imagination, that a very little evidence would persuade a truly wise man to venture any thing for the sake of it. Before I take leave of these doubters, who, professing themselves wise, act very foolishly and madly, I must observe, that though I have condescended to argue with them upon their own principles, it is not because the evidence

for religious truths is really weak and doubtful! Had I time I could shew that it is sufficient to create a moral certainty. As to myself, I no more doubt of them than if I had the evidence of sense and strict demonstration to convince me. And the oftener and more attentively I examine into them the more I am convinced. And this has been the case of numbers in all ages, of the greatest abilities, both natural and acquired, who have considered these points with the utmost diligence, coolness, and impartiality. And surely, the concurrent testimony of such a variety of the most learned and judicious persons, confirming, by their opinions and practice, the strength of the positive evidence for religion, both natural and revealed, demand so much regard from every wise man as to induce him not to act as if religion were false, till he can find better authorities and clearer proofs in support of infidelity or scepticism. But these men never attempt to bring any direct and positive proofs, but only start difficulties, and endeavour to weaken the force of our arguments. And is this sufficient to justify them in risking the loss of eternal happiness, and running the hazard of being eternally miserable? This is bringing a scandal upon reason and common sense. But I shall take the liberty of quoting another illustration of their folly and madness, from a sermon of my own upon Impenitency, p. 14, 15. "It is not enough to doubt, but you must be assured, by the clearest arguments, that what the gospel says of heaven and hell is all romance. If walking in the dark, you should hear a multitude of people, with the utmost earnestness and concern, crying out aloud, Travellers, I beg of you to quit your road instantly, for it leads to a bottomless pit, where you will lie in pain and misery for ever, and you are got upon the brink of it: though you should not immediately be fully convinced, would not the bare possibility of its being true, the frightful apprehension, make you take another road, if you knew of one where there could be no such danger? I say, would you in such a case dare to move one step farther in it? No, you could not do it. Your imagination would fill your mind with such horror, that your limbs, as well as your heart, would fail you. This, thou doubter, is a true, but

“ but faint image of thy condition. You
 “ are walking in thick darkness, not
 “ knowing whither your present course of
 “ life will lead you. Under this uncertain-
 “ ty you hear the prophets, the apostles,
 “ the martyrs, and confessors for Chris-
 “ tianity; you hear teachers and writers
 “ without number, in all ages, and from
 “ all parts of the world, crying, Hold,
 “ miserable wretch! the path in which
 “ you are now going will lead you to
 “ eternal destruction. If you will take
 “ the contrary road, you will find it, in
 “ general, full as pleasant, and, in some
 “ parts of it, much pleasanter, and it
 “ will carry you safe to a most delightful
 “ country. And, for your encourage-
 “ ment to take our advice, we are so far
 “ from having any interest, or bad de-
 “ sign, in giving you this intelligence,
 “ that we take the same road ourselves,
 “ but not before we had used all possible
 “ means of information concerning the
 “ nature and tendency of it. You see
 “ how foolishly and madly they act; let
 “ not therefore their characters, be their
 “ rank, their parts, their reputation,
 “ what they will, any way influence your
 “ judgment or practice; but look upon
 “ them as they are, objects of compassion
 “ for their unhappiness, and of indigna-
 “ tion for their wickedness.” But,

III^{dly}, There is another set of men, who, if possible, act more foolishly and madly than either of the other. For though these points must be acknowledged to be of the last importance, they have never thought it worth while to consider them, never thought of them at all, but live extemporary lives; follow the impulse of every passion that happens to move them; pursue every scheme that occurs to their mind, without ever looking forward to consequences. The others judge and act extremely wrong, unbecoming philosophers; but these men act below the conduct of the animal part of the creation. Beasts and birds act with more regard to self-preservation. As far as instinct teaches them wherein their danger lies, they are ever watchful, ever studious to avoid it. Only these beasts of reason act without any regard to their own safety. In order to illustrate the exceeding great folly of these heedless giddy creatures, I shall borrow another illustration from the sermon above-mentioned, p. 8. “ Suppose

“ a skilful architect should give a man

“ warning that his house is so decayed,
 “ that it is in danger of tumbling over
 “ his head, should not such notice oblige
 “ him, in common prudence, either to
 “ quit it instantly, or, at least, to have it
 “ carefully examined, before he ventures
 “ to continue in it? And, if, notwith-
 “ standing this friendly caution, he should
 “ strive, by business or pleasure, to divert
 “ his thoughts from attending to his
 “ danger, instead of avoiding it, would
 “ not the world say that the man was dis-
 “ tracted, or that he was utterly void of
 “ common sense? And yet, this is an
 “ exact picture of this monstrous indo-
 “ lency.” I must own a mistake, for
 the case is not parallel. The men of
 whom I am speaking, have warning of a
 danger infinitely greater, and yet are as
 unmoved by it. And if any accidental
 cause should force them to entertain a
 transient thought of their danger, they
 are very industrious to banish it out of
 their minds; as if they could take away
 the reality and certainty of their future
 misery by not thinking of it. But, as
 they are not likely to attend to any thing
 that can be said to them, I shall say no
 more upon this head. I should have been
 quite silent, if I had not been in hopes
 that others might learn wisdom by seeing
 a strong picture of their folly, I come,
 now,

In the IVth, and last place, seriously
 to address myself to those who profess a
 thorough belief of religious truths. And
 I must tell such Christian readers that, in
 some respects, they act more inconsistently
 and absurdly than either of the other three
 sorts of people. The first pretend to be
 fully persuaded that religion is a cheat,
 and that there is no such thing as a fu-
 ture state; in consequence of which per-
 suasion, they think it prudent to make
 the most of this world, to make their own
 present interest and happiness the sole rule
 of their conduct. They judge wrong in
 entertaining such a settled opinion, where
 there can be no positive proof; but they
 act right upon their principles. The se-
 cond sort are as much to blame, in running
 the risque of losing eternal happiness, and
 bringing eternal destruction upon them-
 selves, only because the evidence for the
 truth of those grand points does not ap-
 pear to them sufficiently clear and strong;
 for in matters of such infinite moment,
 a less degree, any degree, of evidence
 ought

ought to govern their conduct; but grant them their premises, and their conclusion will be just. The third sort act as absurdly, but with some difference. The next world is invisible and distant; the things of this world are present and visible; from whence they conclude, that it is not worth their while to trouble themselves about such matters. They agree with the others in acting very madly, but they differ in this circumstance, that, whereas the former act right upon wrong principles, these act wrong in consequence of just premises. It is true, that this world is present and visible, but it does not follow from thence that invisible and distant things cannot be worth the consideration of a wise man. But these last sort of fools and madmen, are in every respect inconsistent and inexcusable, for they act in defiance of their settled principles; they believe Christianity, they publicly profess their belief of it, and yet daily, hourly, and deliberately contradict their faith in their practice. Have the patience to give attention while I enlarge a little upon the monstrous inconsistency of such conduct. I have a right to demand this of you, because you acknowledge that the subject is of such vast moment, that it deserves your most attentive consideration.

The first great truth and foundation of all religion is, the belief of a Deity who made you, and made you capable of knowing and contemplating and imitating his moral perfections: you profess to believe that reason and revelation teach you that it is your duty, and will be your happiness, so to do; and yet, how many nominal Christians ever think seriously, how many scarce ever think at all, about the nature and attributes of this adorable Author of their being, and Fountain of their happiness; unless it be now and then, when they are put in mind of him at church, or in conversation. You profess to believe that this Being, infinitely wise, just, good, and powerful, governs the world; and do Christians in general act agreeably to this persuasion? Do they submit and resign themselves to his dispensations? No, if they did, whence so much fretting, so much murmuring, so much distrust under any afflictions and disappointments? Whence so many indirect means to extricate ourselves, when we believe and acknowledge, that if we trust in him, and

apply to him, every thing shall work together for our good; that he will either remove our difficulties, or support us under them, or reward us for bearing them patiently? You believe that it is your duty privately and publicly to worship God, as frequently, as attentively, and as fervently as possibly you can; and yet how many of you never address yourselves to him in prayer in private, or with your family? How often do you neglect public worship upon such scandalously trifling pretences, as would not hinder you from going to make a common visit, or taking your pleasure? And when you are at your devotions, with what inattention, with what coldness and irreverence do you perform them? I do not mean only the poor and illiterate, but persons of better education and more knowledge; not excepting some of the great and the learned. And can such people sincerely believe that religion is the one thing needful? You must bear with my honest freedom a little longer.

Christians believe the bible to be the word of God; that it is an inestimable treasure of the most excellent, the most useful; and entertaining knowledge; that it contains every thing that is necessary for us to believe and practise, in order to our eternal happiness; that it is both in respect to the author, and subject matter of it, worthy of the most profound reverence, and constant and most careful perusal. And do Christians in general, like holy David, make it their constant study and chief delight? No, they seldom look into it, as if it were the most dull and insipid, the most trifling and useless book that ever was published. Nay, (I hope to be excused on account of an honest intention,) I have too much reason to fear that many scholars, though they occasionally look into it as critics, and commentators, to study the sense of a difficult passage, do not read it daily, and practically, to direct their conduct in moral life, and to warm their hearts with a feeling sense of piety. But is this shewing that you believe religion to be the one thing needful? Would you treat any book with such contempt, that taught you any infallible way to success in trade, to riches and honours. I need not wait for an answer. Christianity tells us [and you profess your belief of it] that the way to eternal life is narrow, and that we

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must

must strive to enter into it; that we have many strong passions and habits to subdue; many difficult virtues to acquire; many temptations to seduce us; many enemies within our own corrupt hearts to betray us; many subtle, vigilant, potent enemies from without, to allure and terrify us; that we are always wrestling, not only against flesh and blood, but against principalities and powers, against spiritual wickedness in high places; that we are to be perpetually upon our guard against the wiles of the devil and his agents, as well as against the treachery of our corrupt nature; to take heed to our ways, to keep the door of our lips, and to watch the secret motions of our thoughts; and therefore, that the working out of our salvation being a thing of such labour and difficulty, as well as infinite importance, we ought to do it with fear and trembling. But let any one look round upon mankind and observe, whether their looks and actions speak any such state of warfare and danger. Instead of being anxious for the event of so momentous an affair as our eternal salvation, they look quite easy and unconcerned; instead of being vigilant, they are quite careless; instead of being active, they are quite indolent. And is this behaviour consistent with a persuasion that we think our future welfare the one thing needful? The professors of Christianity declare that they are citizens of another country, that their true riches are in heaven, and that their heavenly treasure will be as durable, and inconceivable, as the torments of the wicked; and yet Christians in general are so far from having their thoughts so full of an immortality of such a bliss, as to have it always lie uppermost for a constant governing principle, that they seldom think of it. Their thoughts, their inclinations, their maxims and schemes, are all sensual and worldly. One man is wholly intent upon a circle of amusements and diversions. This is the grand business of his animal life. Another is intent upon accumulating wealth and making a family; his head and heart are quite full of it. A third is wholly possessed with ambitious desires; places and honours he must have, let the means of acquiring them be ever so inconsistent with the precepts of his religion, and his future happiness and glory. It is impossible that such men should think their

salvation the one thing needful, when they take so little care to secure it. And yet these narrow-minded creatures (I cannot call them men) think themselves, and are thought by others to be, the only shrewd people, because they value the poor beggarly concerns of this life above those of eternity. O gracious God! whence arises this foolishness? It is thou only, the searcher of hearts, that knowest the true cause. Do thou take the veil from before our eyes. Break the charm that bewitches us. Convince us that nothing but eternity deserves our solicitude; that our salvation is the one thing needful, and that whatever does not tend to it is vanity and folly. Make us see more clearly, and know more feelingly, these great truths. Let them always be uppermost in our thoughts, and give them such force and energy, that they may bring forth in us the fruits of good living, to thy honour, and the salvation of our souls.

S E R M O N LXXX.

The Duty of Public Worship.

HEB. x. 25.

Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is, but exhorting one another.

THIS precept was given by St. Paul in the times of persecution; which occasioned many to absent themselves from religious meetings: for the preservation of their lives, their liberties, and estates. We are not under that temptation to neglect our duty; yet in most places it is shamefully neglected; and men are so far from exhorting, that they are more apt to discourage one another, by speaking lightly of it. It cannot, therefore, be unreasonable, and I hope, it will not be unprofitable, if I discourse to you upon the three following heads:

First, That the forsaking of such assemblies is a virtual defection from the Christian faith, and a renunciation of our religion.

Secondly, That it is a neglect of the necessary means of grace, without which we shall not be able or willing to practise the other duties of religion, or long to preserve in our minds any true sense of it.

Thirdly,

Thirdly, To enforce the duty of exhorting one another to assemble ourselves.

First, The forsaking the assembling of ourselves together for public worship is a virtual defection from the Christian faith, and a renunciation of our religion.

For, what is the end of such assemblies, but to make public profession of our religious opinions; to acknowledge the being, attributes, and dispensations of that God in whom we believe; our relations and obligations to him for our creation, preservation, and redemption? And our refusing publicly to testify this our belief, is, in effect, to declare that we do not believe them. There never was any people in the world who believed a God, and yet did not publicly worship him agreeably to their notions of him.

The heathens, however different in their opinions concerning their deities, in different countries, agreed in this great article, viz. to join together in a public acknowledgment of God and his providence over them. As they all owed their being and the continuance of it to the power of their Creator, they all, as many as conveniently could, assembled together to testify their common dependance upon him. As they were conscious that they had all been guilty of many things which were offensive and displeasing to the Deity, they united in offering up such oblations and sacrifices, as they thought might be the means of appeasing God's anger, and averting his judgments. As they believed that he continually interposed to overrule and govern the affairs of the world, they offered up their joint and public requests, that he would protect and bless them. This was so universal a practice, and it is a practice so agreeable to natural reason, that if any one had been known wholly to withdraw himself from such religious meetings, he would have been deemed an atheist, who denied God's being and providence; he would have been wondered at as a monster; he would have been detested as an odious and dangerous person; he would have been executed, or banished the society, as one disqualified for it.

The religion of the Jews was different from that of the heathens, but they agreed with them in having assemblies wherein they jointly and publicly worshipped their God, suitably to their faith. Besides the truths of natural religion, they were fa-

voured with particular revelations of God's nature and will, and they were enjoined particular duties and ordinances; in consequence of which they had those particular revelations publicly read before them, and their laws publicly recited: they united, likewise, in the public observance of their peculiar ordinances. And can we imagine, that if any one among these Jews had totally, or generally, absented himself from their religious assemblies, never or seldom appearing to hear the word of their God read, and his laws rehearsed to them; never or seldom assisting at the common rites and ceremonies; never partaking with them of the common ordinances of their religion: can we imagine, I say, that such an one would not have been thought, and very justly, to have thereby disowned his belief of the Jewish religion?

The religion of us Christians is different from that of the Jews, as the Jewish religion was different from that of the heathens. We have still more extraordinary discoveries of the nature and will of God; our duty in the New Testament is more particularly explained to us, and we have common ordinances, though fewer in number, appointed us. Whoever, therefore, after the manner of too many nominal Christians, refuses to appear at our Christian assemblies, there to hear the scriptures read and expounded, there publicly to profess the doctrines, and attend upon the institutions of our religion; such an one St. Paul, the inspired apostle of Jesus Christ, such an one the nature and reason of the thing declare to be an apostate from the faith, and to have rejected the authority of our blessed Saviour. If he never or seldom goes to any place of public worship, nor makes any kind of public profession of some religion, we have no room to believe that he has any religious opinions at all, nor has he any right to the protection and benefits of the community, of which he is a member, because he can give no security to it for his good behaviour, as having no principles, no conscience to bind him to it. If there be any persons among us so unhappy in their education, so awkward in their way of thinking, that they cannot see sufficient evidence for the truth of revelation after the most diligent and impartial inquiry, (which, however, cannot well be supposed,) we will believe

them to be in earnest, when we see them seriously applying to parliament, as all other dissenters from the established religion have done, for the liberty of worshipping God in their own way. But while they worship no God at all, we are to consider them as perfect infidels, who deny his existence, or, at best, as Epicureans, who deny his providence, both which notions are equally absurd in themselves, and equally detrimental to society. And yet, in opposition to the sentiments of St. Paul, to the reproach of common sense, to the great scandal and prejudice of our countrymen, who make no manner of profession of any religion, nay, and who openly profess that they have none, and make a jest of all that have any, are not only permitted to call themselves by the honourable name of Christians, not only to enjoy the common privileges of a Christian community, but are admitted, frequently, into the most reputable situations, into places of trust and power, into the familiarity and intimacy of the most respected, best beloved friends.

Thus we see that the assembling of ourselves together for public worship is so essential to religion, that a total or general abstinence from them, (for an occasional attendance may be resolved into curiosity, or temporal interest, and so consequently can be no argument of our faith,) is to be understood as a renunciation of it; which I think is a very sufficient proof of the great importance of the duty.

But as it is in its own nature so much of the essence of religion, that we cannot reasonably pretend to any religion without it, so is it likewise a necessary means of religion; necessary in order to preserve in our minds a true sense of it, and to enable us to perform the duties of it: and it is a means of religion both in a natural and preternatural way.

First, It is in itself a natural means of improving our religious sentiments and dispositions.—For what can more naturally tend to give us an awful sense of God, a love and fear of him, than our assembling together to acknowledge him with united voices, to be the common parent and support of the whole world? to celebrate his adorable perfections? and to pay our joint tribute of thanksgiving for the many instances of his goodness to us? The very exercise of these religious acts will help to increase the re-

ligious thoughts from whence they flow. They act upon each other like the soul and the body; and, by the help of the senses, will produce much stranger effects than any private meditations or addresses to God. In the performance of public or joint prayer, the looks, and gestures, and voices, of the congregation will excite and inflame in each other pious affections. For instance, the united voice of a number of people, confessing their sins to God with a proper tone of voice, accompanied with suitable looks and gestures, expressive of sorrow, and shame, and fear; this, I say, will have a much greater effect towards answering the proper ends of confession than a private acknowledgment of their sins is naturally fitted to produce, because the condition of the mind, during its union with the body, is such, that it necessarily receives strong impressions from external objects. In like manner the voice of joy and gratitude, in our songs of praise and thanksgiving, will help to produce, or increase, those emotions and affections of which they are naturally expressive. I am not now using any abstracted or difficult arguments, but only speaking what every one of you knows, and feels to be true.

Though these be natural means, which, assisted by the supernatural influence of God's holy spirit, will produce their genuine effects of piety and virtue; yet they will not alone answer those great ends. Grace assists natural means, and does not operate without them, though it could act as instantaneously as when the word of God's power spake the world into being. But second causes in religious matters will do nothing without the concurrence of God, the first cause of all things. If a person, without any devotion, were to be present in a congregation, where the most ardent piety was expressed in their looks, their voices, and their gestures, he would as naturally and necessarily find himself affected, as a man is moved by a fine picture, a musical voice, or a good instrument; but they would not produce any permanent effects towards making him a better Christian, without the secret operation of the original fountain of all divine as well as natural life. The same spirit which first moved upon the face of the waters, must move upon our hearts. The natural means are to our souls, like the wood upon the altar,

altar, which was lighted by the fire that descended from above. The necessity of God's preventing and assisting grace, towards an acceptable performance of our duty, is plainly asserted in the tenth article of our church, in these words :
 " The condition of man after the fall of
 " Adam is such, that he cannot turn and
 " prepare himself, by his own natural
 " strength and good works, to faith and
 " calling upon God. Wherefore, we
 " have no power to do good works pleasant and acceptable to God without the
 " grace of God preventing us, that we
 " may have a good will, and working
 " with us when we have that good will."

The same notion runs through our whole liturgy. I make no doubt but that those heathens, who made such considerable advances in the knowledge of God, and improvements in moral virtues, had some extraordinary assistances, though in a much lower degree than good Christians enjoy that heavenly gift. When Tully, one of the most eminent of them, says, every extraordinary genius had the benefit of some divine communications; it is probable that under the notion of a divine afflatus, or inspiration, he did not only mean some preternatural illuminations to direct the understanding, but some influence to incline the perverse tendency of the will, and mend the depraved affections of the heart, since he must have been sensible that they stood in as much need of some foreign aid, as the intellectual faculties. Some others among them delivered this notion in still more express terms. Though the Old Testament contains no express promise of the assistances of the Spirit, it is evident that the holy men under that dispensation had a persuasion of such assistance, and prayed for it. The royal prophet is a strong proof of the fact. He prays God to *open, and turn his eyes; to unite and incline his heart; to make him to go; to guide, and lead him; to create in him a clean heart, and renew a right spirit within him.* Solomon also says that *God giveth wisdom; that he directs men's paths, and giveth grace to the lowly.* But, that these great advantages were to be enjoyed in fuller measure under the Christian covenant of grace and truth, than under the Jewish dispensation, we learn from the prophecies. Take that remarkable one of Jeremiah for an instance : *I will put my law in their*

inward parts, and write it in their hearts; they shall all know me from the least of them to the greatest. But Ezekiel still more plainly :—*A new heart also will I give, and a new spirit will I put within you, and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments and do them.* And, that these prophecies do relate to the gospel dispensation cannot be questioned, since Jeremiah's words, to which the others are equivalent, are cited and applied to it in the epistle to the Hebrews. Our blessed Saviour in his last discourse to his disciples tells them, that *his heavenly Father would give the Holy Spirit to every one that asked him.* Again, he says, *my Father and I will make our abode with him. Without me ye can do nothing.* Our bodies are said to be *temples of God, holy habitations to him through the Spirit.* St. Paul speaks of the *love of God shed abroad in our hearts by the Spirit.* He prays often for the churches, that *God would stablish, comfort, and perfect, enlighten and strengthen them.* It is said, that *God opened the heart of Lydia, so that she attended to the things that were spoken of St. Paul.* And God is said to *work in us both to will and to do of his good pleasure.* These and many other places put it beyond all manner of doubt that there are inward communications from God to the powers of the soul, by which we are made both to apprehend the truths of religion, to remember and reflect on them, and to consider and follow them more effectually. Some places, indeed, where the gifts of the Spirit are spoken of, either prophetically in the Old Testament, by way of promise by our Saviour in the New, or by way of doctrine, direction, exhortation, and comfort by the apostles, may signify more immediately those extraordinary powers of working miracles for the establishment of Christianity; yet many of them, if not all that I have cited, are incapable of being restrained to those temporary gifts which ceased after the establishment of Christianity, but are equally applicable to Christians in general, and must relate to the ordinary and common exigencies of Christians to the end of the world. But how are we to acquire these assistances of the Holy Spirit which are thus absolutely necessary to a Christian life? Before we can receive any nutriment from the stock,

we must become branches by ingraftment. Before our carnal nature can receive any new principle of spiritual life, we must be born again of water and the Holy Spirit at our baptism. By this divine institution we, who were by nature dead to all good dispositions and resolutions, acquire an inward principle of holiness. But, as the natural life must be supported by continual supplies, and our strength and vigour will be in proportion to our care in the use of the common means of health, so our spiritual growth and improvement will keep pace with our endeavours, and attendance upon those ordinances which God has appointed as the means of conveying his grace. God doth not inspire us with the knowledge of our duty, as he imparted divine truths to the apostles; neither will he instantaneously and irresistibly infuse good dispositions into us, as he converted St. Paul. We must diligently read, and seriously meditate. Like holy David we must make God's law our study, as often as the necessary affairs of life will permit, and always upon the Sunday, the day set apart, by the authority of God and man, for that purpose. We must commune with our heart in our chamber and be still, retired from the noise and bustle of the world; and then we may be assured of God's blessing upon these means of knowledge and improvement. Provided always, that we ask for it by diligent prayer. God will give his spirit, but it is to those who ask it. *Ask and ye shall have, seek and ye shall find, knock and it shall be opened unto you*; which is a plain declaration that if we obstinately refuse, or carelessly neglect, to use these appointed means, viz, prayer, we are not to expect his grace. But public and joint prayer, as it does more honour, so it is more acceptable to the Supreme Being than private devotion; and he has assured us that he will be more ready to receive and answer those petitions. *Where two or three are gathered together in his name, there is God*, more immediately present by his angels, and by his gracious acceptance and influence. Such devotions receive strength not only from their union, but from the sacredness of the place where they are offered, and of the person who offers them. They are, both of them, in the most solemn manner, dedicated to God himself for that purpose; and it would be reasonable

to believe, though he had made no express declaration of his will, that he should accompany the observance of his own institutions with peculiar marks of his favour. And if there can be any one act of Christian worship preferable to another, in its nature more affecting, in its institution more solemn, in its effects more beneficial, and a greater means of grace; it is the blessed sacrament of our Lord's Supper; that divine and awful institution, appointed for the commemoration of his death, which was the purchase of all the gifts of the Holy Spirit. There we have the closest union and communion with Christ, of which we are capable in this life. *There we dwell in him, and he in us; we are one with Christ, and he with us.* There, therefore, we may expect to receive the most intimate communications of his heavenly grace and favour.

After what has been said, it can be no wonder to you, if those who wilfully and habitually forsake the assembling themselves together for Christian worship, (which is not only a necessary manner of professing ourselves Christians, but the necessary means of preserving a true sense of religion in our minds, and of obtaining the divine assistance, without which we cannot possibly be truly religious;) it can be no wonder, I say, that such should fall away into infidelity or immorality; or that those who seldom attend upon public worship, should be weak in faith, and very imperfect in the discharge of their duty. These effects are as natural as it is for a man to die, who takes in no sustenance to support life, and to be sickly if he does not take enough to keep him in health.

I have left myself but little time for the last head of my discourse, but I must bear hard upon your patience while I say something upon so material a point, as that of the duty of exhorting one another to a due attendance upon public worship.

It is part of our blessed Lord's Prayer, (which ought to be our daily prayer,) that God's will *may be done on earth, as it is in heaven*. The angels in heaven are continually attending upon God to receive his commands; and if we imitate these ministering spirits in their readiness and alacrity, in executing their commissions from their heavenly King, we shall exhort one another to repair, as often as we can, to the courts of the Lord's house, in honour

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of his most glorious name, and in obedience to his commands.

But charity likewise requires this of us. A good-natured man would be forward to give an ignorant and inadvertent neighbour advice in any important affair, or to warn him of any approaching danger. Now, I would ask any man in his senses what can be of greater importance than the public worship of our Maker, who gave us our being, and continually sustains us by his almighty power; of our universal Governor, who by his watchful providence preserves us; of our blessed Redeemer, who saved us from destruction, and purchased for us eternal happiness; of our tremendous Judge, who is to pass an irreversible sentence upon us at the last great and solemn audit of the world? Or what greater danger can attend any one than the danger of losing his title to the blessings of God's providence, by refusing publicly to acknowledge them; of losing the blessed influences of God's grace, by neglecting the means of obtaining it; of incurring his most heavy displeasure, by openly slighting him? If, therefore, you have any bowels of compassion, it must be a concern to you to see any of your brethren so unmindful of their security, so wanting to their own happiness. I will be bold to say, that an unconcernedness on these occasions is a plain proof that men are not, themselves, truly sensible of the vast importance of religious worship, or they would leave no arts of persuasion unattempted to prevail upon each other to attend it. Neighbours would decently remind; friends would kindly and importunately intreat; parents and masters, instead of setting a bad example, would peremptorily command; church-officers would regularly present absenters; and magistrates would rigorously execute the laws upon them.

The clergy are more particularly obliged to be instant in season and out of season, whether the people will hear or whether they will forbear: *Thou shalt in any wise rebuke thy neighbour, and not suffer sin upon him.* This is a direction given to all Christians; but the clergy are commanded to do it with all authority and severity, and that publicly where the crime is of a public nature, and the remissness of their people requires a sharp admonition. But as this is a part of my office very disagreeable to my temper, so I hope

you will give me no occasion to exercise it. Yet, as I cannot wholly acquit you of neglect, especially those of you who have no pretence from business, and whose duty it is to set a good example to their inferiors; those who think it sufficient to serve God on one part of the day, and lawful to indulge and divert themselves either at home or abroad, on the other; those who take the opportunity of doing that on the Sunday which they cannot do on any other day without some hindrance to their worldly business; all such, (and some such there are among us,) with an earnestness becoming the greatness of their danger and my concern, but with a tenderness agreeable to my affection for them, I exhort, I beseech, I conjure, to attend the public worship of God as often as possible, and also to see that their families do their duty in this great article of it, that they may not be partakers with them in this sinful neglect.

S E R M O N LXXXI.

By the Rev. JOHN BALGUY, M. A.

Vicar of North Allerton, and Prebendary of Sarum.

The Duty of brotherly Love, and the ill Effects of party Spirit.

ROMANS, xii. part of the tenth verse.

Be kindly affectioned one to another, with brotherly love.—

TO secure, in some measure, the observance of this necessary duty, God has framed men's minds with suitable propensities, and engaged them by natural instinct. They are born with kind affections for each other, and cannot divest themselves of them, without grossly corrupting their nature, and doing great violence to their own minds. Every man, who is not thus depraved, perceives and feels in himself this disposition; prompting him to do good, and, upon all proper occasions, stirring him up to acts of kindness. The sight of any object in great distress nearly touches him, and before he has had time to reflect, he finds himself powerfully moved. His very spirits take the alarm, and his heart beats quick with charity and compassion. In

short, he finds in himself a warm inclination to relieve the unhappy person, and is in pain till he accomplish it. In like manner, though it be with less emotion, he naturally sympathizes with the happy as well as the miserable; *rejoicing with them that rejoice*, as well as *weeping with them that weep*. He will take a real pleasure in the prosperity of others, and be delighted with every instance of good fortune that befalls them. This, I say, is the natural temper of men's minds, which accordingly appears, and shews itself, in all that are uncorrupted; who never fail to partake of the joys and miseries of their fellow-creatures. Conscious of this disposition, we stile it humanity, thereby not only allowing it to belong to our nature, but appropriating it to our own species.—It may not, perhaps, be needless to add, that the object of these kind inclinations is also unlimited. We are indeed too apt to restrain natural affection to our kindred, not only in the signification of the word, but in the exercise of what it means; thereby contracting it into a very narrow compass. But this is a corruption of our nature, as well as of our language. For natural affection certainly extends, though in a different degree, to our whole species, and prompts us to embrace mankind with universal good-will. And this is agreeable to the sense of my text, where the apostle directs this natural affection to be exercised and exerted towards one another; and moreover requires us to cherish it in this latitude, and take pleasure in it. For so the original (Εἰς ἀλλήλους φιλόστοργον) most properly signifies. This being premised, I beg leave to consider briefly, what obligations we lie under, as men and as Christians, to cultivate and improve these kind affections. And,

First, I would inquire into the reasonableness of the duty. That the esteem and affection of our fellow-creatures is a real good, needs no other proof than every man's own experience. If we consider it abstractedly from its beneficial effects, even thus we may discover it to have an intrinsic value; and that because it is naturally grateful to the mind that possesses it, which of itself is a sufficient reason for its being so generally desired and prized. However, it becomes much more valuable by those benefits and services that flow from it; esteem and good-will are naturally accompanied with an in-

clination to perform good offices. Whenever therefore we are in possession of the former, we think ourselves in some measure entitled to the latter; and for the sake both of the one and the other, we all covet the affections of other men, and are desirous of recommending ourselves to their favour and friendship. From hence it follows, by the plainest rule of reason and equity, that we ought to bear good-will towards them: for how can we expect that others should be well-affected to us, if we be disaffected, or even indifferent towards others? In like manner, how can we pretend to receive kindnesses and benefits, if we refuse, on a proper occasion, to confer them? Supposing abilities and opportunities equal, they must needs have the same title to our good offices, that we have to theirs; because no reason or plea can possibly be alleged by us, but what may equally be alleged by them. The obligations therefore between us are, and must be, reciprocal; and by consequence all men are obliged to be kindly affectioned and friendly to each other. But,

Secondly, We may perceive even a necessity of practising this duty, in the very condition and circumstances of our being. Man is by nature weak and indigent, and not capable alone of making any tolerable provision for his own welfare; he is liable to many evils which he cannot redress; exposed to many wants which he is not able to supply; and incumbered with many desires which he knows not how to gratify. In all these respects he stands in need of the protection or assistance of his fellow-creatures, and the same helpless condition being common to all mankind, necessarily fixes the whole species in a state of dependance upon one another. Hence we find, that they ever had recourse to society, as the common refuge of human infirmities; where, by a mutual communication of service, and interchange of good offices, they might obtain those comforts of life which were not to be met with in solitude. But how could this point be gained, or how should society turn to any account, without those kind affections, and that friendly disposition, which we are considering? If men were generally disinclined to one another, if, instead of kindness and affability, they received each other with aversion and disdain, if they were morose and unf sociable, contentious and quarrellsome, prone to give offence and

and commit wrongs, and yet impatient of the least injury, and implacable in their resentments: if, I say, such a temper as this generally prevailed, who sees not that society would be a curse instead of a blessing? Upon this supposition the best and wisest thing that men could do, would be to break up and disperse, to return into solitude, and even hide themselves in a desert.—But, without these extremities, it is evident, that the happiness of any community is disturbed and diminished in proportion to the unkindness and ill-will that arise in it. And even a bare indifference, as far as it extends, defeats the end of society, and renders it useless to mankind. If we turn the supposition the other way, we may discover,

Thirdly, The great advantage of a benevolent disposition. Let us then suppose a society flourishing in peace, and cemented by love; where all the members were inviolably attached to the public good, and harmoniously conspired in the service thereof; where unfeigned goodwill, and undissembled affection, universally prevailed; where every man was a sincere friend to every man; in a word, where all men vigorously and cheerfully exerted themselves in acts of kindness, and labours of love. What could be more beneficial, or more delightful, than such a temper and such a practice? What could sooner, or better, or more effectually, advance and establish the public happiness, and the welfare of every individual? The very idea of such a society carries a proof along with it of the point before us, and presents to our view innumerable pleasures and advantages, which, alas! we can only enjoy in speculation.—And as such a disposition has a happy influence on society, (which in fact is always proportionable to the prevalence of it,) so it produces suitable effects in the minds of all who are blessed with it. For, not to mention that peace and tranquillity which must necessarily arise from the absence of many turbulent and tormenting passions, it may be laid down as a certain truth, that so much benevolence is in reality so much happiness; every exercise of it is naturally pleasing to him who is truly possessed of it, and the higher it rises, and the further it extends, the more delightful it becomes. Generous actions are a perpetual gratification to a generous spirit, and the charitable man is ever

feasting upon his own charities. They often enjoy, in doing good, a greater, and more exquisite pleasure, than the most refined voluptuary ever tasted.—But the good man's satisfaction is not confined within the narrow sphere of his own abilities. Whatever good is done, or whatever good is received, if it fall within the compass of his observation, or come to his knowledge, he enjoys it in reflection, and it becomes a real addition to his own happiness. The very blessings of Heaven that descend every where in such plenty and profusion, all administer to his comfort, and contribute to the increase of his treasure. Wherever they may directly fall, they are sure to rebound upon him; forasmuch as he continually rejoices at them, and is ever well-pleased with his neighbour's success. In short, he thus partakes of all the prosperity that he sees or hears of, and is a sharer of every man's joy.

Fourthly, We may proceed to consider the excellence of this benevolent disposition. And most certainly nothing can be more agreeable to the dignity of our natures, nothing can more improve or adorn our minds, nothing can raise them to a higher or nobler pitch. What can be better, what more amiable, than kind affections, and worthy actions? Those shining characters in history, which have been transmitted down from age to age with so much applause, and charmed every reader; what ingredients do they consist of? Are they not made up of benevolence, kindness, humanity, generosity, public spirit, and the love of mankind? Animated by such principles as these, the benefactors of antiquity performed the most illustrious actions, surmounting all difficulties, and cheerfully sacrificing wealth, ease, liberty, and life itself, to the public good. What wonder, then, if such names be covered with glory, and attract the admiration of all posterity? And in truth there is something so beautiful, so lovely, in beneficence and kindness, that all men of honest and undepraved minds are naturally very much delighted with such eminent examples of them. But the excellence of this temper chiefly consists in its conformity to the goodness and perfection of God himself, who *maketh his sun to rise on the just and on the unjust.* (Mat. v. 45.) *Who leads us with his benefits, and crowns us with*
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mercy and loving-kindness. (Ps. lxxviii. 19. ciii. 4.) Who showers down on all his creatures blessings and bounties in the greatest abundance, and is every moment communicating good, and diffusing happiness through a whole universe; and all this without a possibility of any other view, than that of doing good and making happy. Whatever then is the best imitation, and the nearest resemblance of this goodness that men are capable of, must needs be most worthy, and most excellent, and conduce in the highest degree to the raising, improving, and accomplishing our natures. And this is the very case of the virtue I am treating of. For certainly nothing can be more divine than love and charity; nothing more god-like than doing good. From whence we may justly conclude, not only that it is God's will we should imitate him herein, but that we should be particularly careful to attain so great an excellence, to arrive at so divine a perfection. Thus far, then, our obligations reach as we are men, directed only by the light of nature, and instructed by reason.

We are next to consider ourselves as Christians, in which view we shall find our obligations carried to a much greater height. Those kind affections with which nature and reason jointly inspire us, are by Christianity exalted into brotherly love; we are not to look upon ourselves as bound only by the ties of humanity; we are not to consider our fellow-Christians barely as partakers of the same nature, but as brethren, in the highest and most sacred sense; as members of the same body, as partakers of the same redemption, and co-heirs of everlasting life. These considerations bind us in a peculiar manner to brotherly love. And accordingly the gospel every where enjoins and inculcates it with great strictness: *This is the message*, says the apostle, *that ye heard from the beginning, that we should love one another.* (1 John, iii. 11.) And indeed it is evident that Christ and his apostles, from the beginning to the end of their ministry, breathed nothing but the purest love, and most fervent charity. They earnestly exhorted and urged men to it, and laid the utmost stress on it upon all occasions. It is styled by the apostle *the royal law* (Jam. ii. 8.); it is represented as *the end of the commandment* (1 Tim. i. 5.); or, in other words, as the main scope and drift

of the Christian institution. It is said to be *the bond of perfectness* (Col. iii. 14.), and *the fulfilling of the law.* (Rom. xiii. 10.) Our blessed Saviour not only most emphatically calls it *his commandment* (John, xv. 12.), but makes choice of it as the most proper badge and characteristic of his followers: *By this*, says he, *shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if you love one another.* (John, xiii. 35.) Thereby plainly informing us, that it is not only an indispensable duty, but a virtue of the highest rank, and the most essential quality of a Christian. And as Christ has given us such precepts concerning love and charity, so he was himself the highest and most perfect example of it, that ever appeared in the world. Those characters, however illustrious, which I hinted at before, were as much beneath his, in all respects, as the gentile morality was inferior to the doctrines of the gospel. Whenever we seriously reflect, who he was, and what we were, and consider at the same time what he did, and what he suffered, from first to last, for the sinful and unworthy race of mankind; we immediately discover, that there never was upon earth any love like his; a love so active, so intense, so unlimited, and so divine, that no words are able to express it, no thoughts to conceive it.

Having thus considered our obligations, as men, and as Christians, to perform this duty, I might proceed to observe, and lament the deficiency and disproportion of our practice. I might also point out the chief causes and occasions of it, and endeavour to lay down such rules as seem to conduce most to the promoting of benevolence and brotherly love: but the remainder of my time not allowing of many particulars, I only beg leave to insist upon one, and to offer an expedient, which, though perhaps less regarded, yet seems to be of very great importance.

What I mean is, that we would carefully guard our minds against that spirit of party which usually prevails so much among us, and to which we seem so unaccountably addicted. It must indeed be confessed, that it is of late considerably abated; and good reason have we to rejoice at it. But then we should not neglect it upon this account; on the contrary, we should look upon this as a fair opportunity of exerting ourselves, and expelling it quite from among us. Since

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our distemper has remitted, it may now be more easily dealt with. We should therefore use our utmost endeavours to perfect a cure, and prevent a relapse. It may be justly questioned, whether there be any impediment to love and charity greater and more powerful than this; and therefore nothing is more to be wished than an entire removal of it.

In order whereeto, we should do well to consider, what various mischiefs and miseries attend it, how many ways it tends to disturb our happiness, and embitter our lives. And here it were easy to shew, how unavoidably it destroys the peace of our minds, by introducing needless disquietudes and vexations, by kindling the most troublesome passions, and blowing up the coals of strife and contention. It were easy to shew, how deeply it injures our reputations, by occasioning a mutual propagation of calumny and slander; by causing the fairest actions to be misrepresented and discoloured, by rendering it almost impossible for any man, with his utmost endeavours, to give a general content, or even gain any approbation out of his own party. I might also observe how it tends to corrupt our very understandings; as it infuses into them innumerable prejudices, and thereby vitiates our judgments; as it draws them off from the evidence of things, and represents to them questions and facts in a false light; as it renders them pliant and ductile, and easy to be deluded; as it inures them to embrace notorious falsehoods, and digest the most palpable absurdities. But more especially we should consider, how ill an effect it has on our morals. It lessens our concern for things of great moment, and increases it for matters of no consequence. It inclines us to bigotry and superstition. It tends to confound the very distinctions of good and evil. It undermines justice and mercy, the main pillars of all religion. It roots up our kind affections, and good dispositions; and instead of them fills our hearts with rage and rancour. In short, this party spirit eats into our breasts like a cancer; corrupts and poisons our best humours; and in a great measure devours that love and good-will which is the chief ornament of our minds, and the glory of our natures.

Nor is it less injurious to the public than private persons. It is evident, from

the nature of the thing, and from what has been already observed, that nothing can have a greater tendency to embroil a state, and throw it into the utmost disorder. As sure as love and unity is the great bond of society, so sure is division and strife the bane of it. Those jarring aims, and interfering motions which are produced by it, must necessarily occasion stops and breaches among the wheels of government. And if it rise high, and be of long continuance, the best and firmest constitution in the world must at last sink under it. But let us appeal to fact and experience. Does not this abundantly inform us, that where party *strife is, there is confusion and every evil work?* Has it not sometimes thrown us into the most dangerous ferments? Has it not put the kingdom into flames, that no body knew how to extinguish; and which, in spite of all endeavours, have continued and raged on to the next generation?—It is with good reason believed, that this kingdom can only fall by its own hands. So kind have nature and providence been to us; such is our situation, and so great our strength, that if ever we come to ruin, if ever we be brought to desolation, it must be by being divided against ourselves; by that intestine strife which preys upon our vitals, and cuts the very sinews of government. Next to the love of our whole species, our strongest obligations are to the love of our country. And accordingly it is deeply rooted in our natures, and hardly to be effaced by time or accident. What pity it is so noble a passion should ever degenerate, and dwindle into affection for a party?

Should it be inquired, what it is that thus straitens our minds, and contracts our inclinations; I believe this mischief would be found originally owing to vanity and self-love. For how comes it to pass that we are so much pleased with those of our own party? Because they subscribe to our sentiments, and think as we do. And why are we so much offended at the adversary? Because he rejects our opinions, and follows his own. And what does all this amount to, but a compliment paid to our own understandings? It is not otherwise to be conceived, how the opinions of others come to affect us, either with so much complacency or displeasure.

To these considerations give me only leave

leave to add, what naturally offers itself to our thoughts at this time. As nothing can be more seasonable, nothing more dutiful; so I humbly suppose, nothing could be more acceptable to our gracious sovereign, in this beginning of his reign, than for his subjects to make him a joint sacrifice of all their remaining feuds and animosities. How just and solid a pleasure would it give him, to see all discord, all variance at an end; and the hearts of his whole people knit together in the bonds of mutual affection? Such a period put to our domestic dissensions, would not only contribute to his repose; would not only make his crown sit easy upon his head, but very much add to the lustre of it. Nay, it would redound more to his glory, than holding the balance of Europe, and being the awful umpire of contending kingdoms.

And as to ourselves, what can be more beneficial, what more desirable? Are they not our differences and divisions, that chiefly, at any time, obstruct our happiness? Is not this the very evil that lately hung over us, like a thick cloud, and darkened our prospect? a prospect, both then and now filled with such blessings, as not only intimately affect us, but promise security and happiness to many distant generations. If our laws, our liberties, our religion, be dear to us, we cannot but rejoice to see them so firmly guarded, and strongly fenced. To see the throne filled by a prince, who, along with the crown and dignity of his royal father, inherits his high qualities, and kingly endowments; who greatly approves and admires our happy constitution; who is cordially devoted to the welfare of his people, and attached to them by inclination and affection, no less than by interest. To see likewise round about the throne a hopeful and numerous progeny, blooming in all the gifts of nature, and blessed with all the advantages of education; from their infancy formed to every thing praise-worthy, by a princess of the greatest virtue, and most consummate wisdom. These, and the like blessings, how we may prize, now we have them, I shall not pretend to say; but most certainly if we had them not, we should desire them above all things, and think them of inestimable value.

Upon the whole, if we have any regard to our own welfare, or the interest

of our posterity; if we bear any true love to our king, or our country; let us make it appear by entirely putting an end to our unhappy divisions. Let us no longer exasperate each other by virulent words and opprobrious terms of distinction; by injurious actions, or disobliging treatment; but *be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love.* Let us distinguish ourselves no otherwise, than by being perfectly well affected to our excellent constitution in church and state, and to him who happily presides over both. And let no other strife be prolonged among us, except who shall be most zealous and active in the service of the public. This we may surely do, without engaging in any party; provided we do but take care to live peaceably and charitably with those who have the misfortune to be otherwise minded. We are obliged *in meekness and gentleness to instruct those who oppose themselves.* (2 Tim. ii. 25.) This is the Christian rule; and no difference of opinion, how wide soever, can ever justify our departure from it.—To conclude, let us unanimously *follow after the things that make for peace.* And since we are blessed with the best constitution and the purest religion in the world, and with the fairest hopes of a long enjoyment of both; since divine Providence has distinguished us by numberless mercies and favours, above all the nations round about us; let us shew ourselves grateful by a wise, a virtuous, and a peaceable conduct; and study henceforward to *walk worthy of the vocation wherewith we are called.*

SERMON LXXXII.

By the Rev. JOHN BROWN, M. A.

Chaplain to the Bishop of Carlisle.

On the Use and Abuse of Externals in Religion.

JOHN, iv. 23.

But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth.

THE great force of religion on the minds and morals of mankind hath been so generally acknowledged, that in all

all ages and countries of the known world, it hath ever been made a part of the public concerns of state, to encourage and protect it. Yet, to the disgrace of human nature, we must confess, that the institutions of religion have been too generally abused; inſomuch, that ſome have made it a queſtion, whether the miſchiefs it hath occaſioned, put into the ſcale of reaſon, would not outweigh the good it hath produced. Though it would bring no diſgrace on true religion to acknowledge the miſchiefs of falſe zeal in their full extent; yet I do not think the aſſertion true: it ſeems to have ariſen from thoſe impreſſions to which the human imagination is ſubject, when it takes not reaſon for its guide. The miſchievous effects of falſe zeal have generally been public and notorious, breaking forth into wars, and the ſubverſion of empires: on the contrary, the good effects of true religion have been, and ſtill muſt be, of a permanent and ſilent nature, working effectually, but ſecretly, on the human heart; and infuſing themſelves, by gentle degrees, through all the faculties of the ſoul. Here then we plainly ſee the reaſon, why the miſchievous effects of falſe religion may ſeem to overbalance the good effects of true: every eye gazes with wonder on the ſtorm that levels towers and forests, and ſweeps away the labours of mankind; while the dews of heaven fall unnoticed by the common eye; though by their ſilent influence they crown the harveſt with plenty, and make the vallies to laugh and ſing.

Yet great, no doubt, and terrible have been the miſchiefs of miſtaken zeal: of zeal, contending not only about doctrines, but places and modes of worſhip. About things deſigned and inſtituted for the ends of peace; but perverted by ſuperſtition to the purpoſes of diſcord. Our bleſſed Saviour, knowing what was in man, ſeems, in the paſſage here cited from the goſpel, to have intended a total prevention of this perſecuting ſpirit; by declaring, that neither particular place nor mode of worſhip ſhould be of any intrinsic value under the Chriſtian diſpenſation: that the local and peculiar ceremonies of Judaism were to give way to a religion of a more exalted nature; that the hour was now come, when the true worſhippers ſhould worſhip the Father in ſpirit and in truth: not with the painful rites and

ceremonies required by the law, which only ſhadowed that which Chriſt performed; but with that more ſublime and ſpiritual worſhip which ſhould ſuit the genius of Chriſtianity. *For the Father, ſaith he, ſeeketh ſuch to worſhip him.*

That this is the import of the words, will appear, by conſidering the context: the explanation of which will at the ſame time diſcover to us the reaſon of this ſeeming mutability in the will of God: who deals not with his creatures according to the abſurd rigour of the law of the Medes and Perſians, *which altereth not*: but while himſelf ſits enthroned in the glories of unchangeable wiſdom, condeſcends to the weakneſs of his creatures, and adapts his various laws to their various ſituation and capacity.

At the time of the migration of the Jews from Egypt, the whole world was ſunk in idolatry. They alone were bleſſed with the knowledge of the true God: yet even they were perpetually relapſing into the abſurdities of idol-worſhip. Hence that load of peculiar ceremonies was impoſed on them; all tending by various means to one great end; that of keeping them pure from idolatry, of ſeparating them from the worſhip of the pagan nations that ſurrounded them, and confirming them in that of the true God. To this end the temple was built, and the worſhip eſtabliſhed at Jeruſalem: hither the whole nation was obliged to reſort at ſtated times, to prevent their relapſe into idolatry.

The Samaritans were a ſect who had divided from the Jews; and for the ſame ends had built a temple on mount Gerizim; where they likewise periodically performed the ceremonies enjoined by the law.

Theſe ceremonies, and this ſeparation of the Jews from the gentiles, were deſigned by Providence to be continued till the coming of Chriſt, but now a glorious change was to take place. The world was now prepared, by higher degrees of knowledge, for the reception of the goſpel. This was the hour appointed for the Sun of Righteouſneſs to riſe, for his light to be ſpread over the face of the whole earth. Every circumſtance and ceremony was now to be done away, that tended to keep up the former ſeparation; nothing to be eſtabliſhed, ſave what tended to a general union of mankind: and the peculiar,

peculiar, the local, and periodical worship of Jerusalem, to be swallowed up in that more spiritual dispensation, which was designed to produce universal peace and charity. And now we shall only need to repeat the passage before us, in order to discover at once its meaning and propriety. The woman of Samaria, desirous of information, says to Jesus: *Our fathers worshipped in this mountain; and ye say, that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship. Jesus said unto her, woman, believe me, the hour cometh when ye shall neither in this mountain, nor at Jerusalem, worship the Father. The hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth; for the Father seeketh such to worship him.*

But as in avoiding one extreme, it hath too generally been the fate of mankind to fly to its opposite; so here, this declaration, which implies only the abolition of the ceremonial law, and the establishment of a more pure and spiritual worship, hath frequently been misinterpreted into an express command against all external ceremonies and public religion. Not only unlettered enthusiasts have often fallen into this extreme; but we have heard one of reputation and abilities declare, that Christianity is "no more than a kind of divine philosophy existing in the mind."

And indeed were men in the condition of angels, this might, for ought we know, be true; but while we are in our present, more imperfect, and embodied state, it will be found necessary, on impartial inquiry, to call in externals to our aid, if we would indeed accomplish that great purpose, of worshipping God in spirit and in truth. Let us therefore proceed to the proof of this; and from this proof will evidently appear the efficacy, the necessity of public religion, and the reasonableness of this day's solemnity.

I. Therefore, the public institutions of religion are necessary; because without public religion, mankind in general would relapse into a state of barbarism, and a total forgetfulness of all religion. I believe, it is no breach of truth or charity to affirm, that a great part of mankind are so deeply immersed in business or pleasure, that they seldom turn their thoughts to God, seldom recollect either their obligations to him, or their de-

pendence on him, save only when they are drawn by the stated returns of public worship. Some indeed are so hardened and unhappy, as to be proof against every call; but much greater numbers are swayed by the arbitrary power of custom; and yield to the rules of decency, when they would scorn those of duty. Now among this number, there are none perhaps who receive not at least some temporary impressions of religion; which though they work not their intire and full effect, though they be soon choked by the cares and pleasures of the world, yet keep those cares and pleasures at a stand, and prevent them from swallowing up the soul in a total degeneracy. Others there are, no doubt, who, by their appearance here, are happily surprized into a sense of piety and religion; whose callous hearts are softened and prepared for the impressions of divine grace, by the solemnity of public worship; who come deaf to every call but that of decency and custom; but depart with a better sense of things upon their mind, roused from their lethargy of soul, to listen to the warning voice, which bids them return to *the right way, and walk in it.*

II. Even among those who in their private devotions are most sincere, external acts and ceremonies, when properly conducted, become real assistances. There is that strong and mutual connection between the body and the soul, between the senses and imagination, the passions and the reason of mankind, that they uniformly act and re-act upon each other; and, by this mutual rebound, work effects which to a common eye may seem almost miraculous. Is it not a general and a just complaint, that the mind of man is drawn forcibly down from the contemplation of divine things, by the allurements of the outward senses? What lessons of morality have been given on this important topic? How often and how powerfully have mankind been exhorted to avoid every inviting temptation of sight and hearing; because these, working on the imaginations and passions of mankind, do inevitably sink the soul in every sensual excess? Now so it hath happened, that many of these pious moralists, not penetrating into the full extent of the human frame, have branded the senses and imagination, as the natural enemies of all virtue; forgetting, that by a pro-

per application, they might be enlisted in her service, and happily converted into natural instruments of the noblest purposes of religion. For as many objects of sense tend to debase the mind, so there are others which no less tend to exalt it. Hence indifferent things gain their efficacy; for as the soul, in common life, is too generally drawn down by earthly objects; so it is the province of public religion to counter-work their operations, and elevate the mind to the contemplation of divine things, by external and solemn institutions. Thus, the appointed times of worship will naturally put us in mind of the importance of that work we are called to: the grandeur, awful silence, and solemnity of the house of God, when we enter into it, will naturally awaken those impressions of love and gratitude, those sentiments of humility and submission, which are the proper foundations of unfeigned devotion. The humble posture of kneeling in prayer, of standing up with a more assured reverence when we praise our Maker, the giving voice and accent both to our prayers and praises, all these, as they are the natural efforts of the soul working on the body; so, by a rebound on the imagination, they raise the soul to new and higher degrees of fervour, tending to fix more warm and lasting impressions of devotion and virtue on the heart.

III. Beside these great effects, we must not forget the powerful influence of example in the public worship of God. By example I mean not only that which works by shame or emulation, nor that which awakens cool reflection in the mind, by both which religion and piety are indeed often promoted; but I mean that sympathy of soul so strongly prevalent in human nature, which, like fire among combustible matter, immediately runs through the mass, converting the whole into its own likeness. The passions are contagious. Fear, hope, grief, joy, exultation, and rapture, shining forth in the countenance of our fellow-creatures, strike themselves into our hearts, and awaken corresponding feelings in the soul. Thus the sight of a congregation seriously united in worship, does naturally inspire additional degrees of piety and reverence. Every individual at once gives and receives new fervours of devotion: a devotion far more animated than can easily

be raised in the retirement of the closet. We become more ardent in prayer, more attentive in hearing; and when the voices of the congregation join with the instrument of divine praise, and the powers of harmony, our hearts are doubly warmed with gratitude, and then indeed do we worship the Lord *in the beauty of holiness*.

IV. Though each of these effects, when separately considered, are of great weight; yet when united, they receive still higher degrees of usefulness and efficacy, especially when enforced by the power of custom. Those places, actions, ceremonies, postures, forms of worship, to which we have been long accustomed, and to which we have habitually joined the ideas of reverence, piety, sanctity, gratitude, and devotion; these, I say, will always affect us in the most warm and effectual manner. This arises from a quality in the soul, called, in the language of philosophers, the power of association; by which the imagination by repeated acts joins things together, which in themselves are separate: but I chuse rather to call it by the more intelligible name of custom. Through this frequent repetition therefore, every accustomed place and form of worship works a stronger effect on the soul; in comparison of which any new adopted form appears dead and powerless. To those the imagination more forcibly joins the ideas of reverence and sanctity; and is thence more effectually stirred up to a fervency of devotion.

And now shall I need to explain to you the propriety and reasonableness of this day's solemnity? Its design is, "By a legal, solemn, and public act, to separate this place," [St. James's church, in Whitehaven, 1753,] "from common uses, and consecrate it to the public worship of almighty God." Not that we can bring down or confine the immensity of the Godhead to the narrow circuit of these walls; that God who dwelleth not in temples made with hands, whom even the mighty temple of the universe, the heaven of heavens, cannot contain! But by this peculiar and solemn destination, it is naturally fitted to strike the human mind with additional degrees of awe and reverence. This fact hath been so universally acknowledged, that all ages and nations, according to their apprehensions of religion, have concurred in the practice of consecration. Yet the

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true reason hath not always been apprehended: it hath often been practised on superstitious motives. But the practice, as here explained, and here performed, is not the effect of a weak superstition, as hath been blindly suggested of late by some, who neither understood human nature nor themselves. It is the natural and genuine result from the constitution of the human frame; which, as it always annexes the ideas of horror and detestation to those places where any notorious and execrable act of wickedness hath been committed, so it naturally joins the impressions of reverence and devout respect to those which have been solemnly dedicated to religion and virtue. Let us appeal, therefore, to experience. Would any man chuse, for the place of his devotions, a dungeon, the habitation of criminals, or a den, the receptacle of thieves and robbers? Would he chuse to purify his mind in the places where the impure and polluted scenes of drunkenness, lewdness, and debauchery, are daily acted? Would not the consciousness of these abominations strike upon his soul, mix itself with every exalted and heavenly contemplation, and, like a muddy stream falling into clear waters, debase and contaminate their native purity? Now, in a place set apart by solemn destination to divine worship, an effect the very reverse of this takes place. Every object that presents itself brings along with it some idea, some image, some awakening circumstance of sanctity or virtue. As these flow in, the soul divests itself of every turbulent and unquiet passion; debauchery and profaneness are checked in their career; hypocrisy relents; cruelty stands subdued; and revenge, for a while, forgets its nature. The soul, thus cleansed from its vicious inclinations, becomes prepared for the reception of every heavenly influence. That God, to whom this sacred place is now dedicated, though every where and at all times present, becomes here more intimately present to the mind. Here the love of a Saviour, by frequent and solemn commemoration, becomes the natural object of our meditations and gratitude. Here we more warmly acknowledge, and by that acknowledgment acquire still higher portions of the divine spirit of grace. Here the virtues of faith and hope, meekness and forgiveness, good-will and charity, like so many mes-

sengers from heaven sent down to conduct us thither, meet us at our entrance; infusing into our hearts peace and joy, such as the world cannot give. In a word, every object that we see or hear, works a strong effect on the human frame; and conspires to elevate the soul from the love of earthly things, to the fruition of God and virtue. Such then is the nature and reasonableness of this day's solemnity. A solemnity adapted to the frame and capacities of man. Angels, perhaps, need not stoop to it; brutes cannot rise to it; but the man who feels not its influence, must be either angel or brute; must be above or below the condition of humanity.

In consequence of these truths, give me now leave to add some few observations.

1. Having thus fixed the nature and end of external institutions, and shewn that they are only the proper and appointed means of worshipping God more effectually in spirit and in truth, we shall now easily discover the dangerous effects of thinking too highly of them. From this extreme hath arisen the folly of vowing long and tedious pilgrimages, as a thing meritorious in the sight of God. A journey to Mecca is almost the one thing necessary in the Mahometan religion: a voyage to Jerusalem was no less so, in the dark and superstitious ages of Christianity. A pilgrimage to Loretto is still a matter of importance within the circuit of the Roman church. All these seem to be absurd and groundless imitations of the periodical worship at the temple of Jerusalem: for which indeed there was a substantial reason, as explained above; but which ceased to exist on the establishment of Christianity. Yet, in spite of our Saviour's preventing admonition, the most distant inhabitants of Europe must needs worship the Father at Jerusalem: the effects of this absurd imitation were such as might naturally be expected. The pilgrimage, having no rational end, was itself raised into the catalogues of meritorious actions; and, with the common pride and insolence of usurpers, expelled those real virtues which ought ever to reign in the human heart. Purity of manners was banished, to make way for licentiousness; and persecuting zeal supplanted Christian charity. The pilgrimage or crusade atoned for all: in proof of which I need only refer you to the history of those vagrant times. This, indeed,

indeed, is the natural consequence of over-rating the externals of religion. For where positive institutions are mistaken for real virtues, and rested in, not as means but as ends, they will ever be laid hold of by self-deceiving men, as an atonement for the guilt of indulged appetites; thus outward pomp takes place of inward piety, and the idle fopperies of an unmeaning devotion are made sacred at the expence of true holiness and virtue. This extreme is no less destructive to charity than common morals. Hence hath often flowed that bitterness of spirit among religious sects, for, mistaking the true end of their respective institutions, either through ignorance or pride, and giving the sanction of the divine authority to their own establishments, they have not failed to brand each other with the most odious names; and conduct themselves with such mutual hatred and uncharitableness, as became a reproach to that religion they professed.

2. As many have erred in thinking too highly of the externals of religion, so others have erred, in too lightly regarding them; this hath happened sometimes out of a spirit of contempt, and sometimes from misguided caution. There is a certain spirit of contempt, generally prevalent among those who would aspire to the character of philosophers, without the drudgery of thinking. Among these men, (who, we know, abound in the present, and probably have abounded in every age,) external institution of every kind passeth for a thing of nought. They despise the outworks of society, alike in politics and religion. Yet they might do well to consider, that things in themselves indifferent, may, by mutual consent, as we have seen, become the natural means of advancing pure religion. They might do well to consider, that although these particular means are no where prescribed, yet, that whoever so lightly accounts of these institutions, as to despise, neglect, or violate them, does indeed and virtually transgress the laws of God; because he obstructs that which is the end of every divine command, the common happiness of mankind. With regard to those that have erred in this extreme from a principle of misguided caution, it needs only be observed, that they form to themselves a wrong idea of themselves and human na-

ture. That spiritual devotion does by no means exclude bodily worship; that, on the contrary, the one is necessarily heightened by the other, through the strict union of soul with body. That they are vainly attempting to reverse the order of providence, and labouring to raise themselves from their embodied state, to that of pure intellect, before the appointed time; that by this they rob themselves of those real advantages which the God of nature hath ordained, while they refuse to call in the senses and imagination, as the natural aids of true and spiritual worship.

3. We may here observe and admire the wisdom and excellence of Christianity, in not appointing its profelytes the observance of any particular form of rites or ceremonies. The Jewish ceremonial law being appropriated to the use of one people, assembled in one place, tending only to the purpose of a temporary separation, had in these respects its relative propriety and excellence. On the contrary, the Christian religion, being destined for the service of all mankind, of every age and nation, near and remote, civilized and barbarous, hath, with equal wisdom, left the institution of external ceremonies to the consent and various circumstances of different times and nations. Thus every country has the power of suiting them to the climate, customs, tempers, and manners of its people. Whereas, had they been delineated and prescribed with the rigour of a local religion, they must often have clashed with the prevailing manners of a nation, and greatly obstructed the completion of Christianity.

4. From the principles laid down above, we may draw a powerful argument in favour of mutual forbearance and moderation among religious sects. We have seen that the forms of religious worship derive a part of their force from custom. That those places, actions, postures, forms, and ceremonies, to which the mind hath been accustomed, and to which it hath habitually joined the ideas of reverence and devotion, will always have a stronger effect, than they can possibly work on him who is yet a stranger to them. Every religious sect, therefore, must ever view its own peculiar institutions in a more advantageous light, than any other can possibly behold them. Habit gives them an additional force and efficacy,

efficacy, which none, who have not been subject to that habit, can possibly comprehend. It throws a kind of radiance or glory round them; giving them the lustre of something sacred and divine. Were this honest and laudable partiality rightly apprehended and considered, and as duly moderated as it is natural and strong, it would surely tend to soften those mutual expressions of contempt and hatred, so freely bestowed on each other by religious parties. It is a partiality natural to us as men: highly laudable, so far as it heightens our own devotions; but deserves the severest reproofs, when it presumes to intrude upon the devotions of our neighbour.

5. Therefore, instead of judging uncharitably of others, let us rather take heed, that in the exercise of our own most excellent institutions, we conduct ourselves in that decent and becoming manner, as may raise our souls to the true and spiritual worship recommended by our Saviour. So far as parties concerned may be allowed to judge, we have the strongest reasons to believe, that no forms of worship hitherto established among men, can better answer these great purposes than our own. That none excel them in united dignity, simplicity, solemnity, and power. Notwithstanding this, if they be negligently or absurdly conducted, they at once lose their nature and efficacy; for external forms being addressed to the senses, their whole force lies in a becoming conduct of them. If therefore the ministers of the word betray any indecency, either of meanness or foppery, in habit, speech, or gesture; if they prefer the petitions of the congregation, or read, or preach in an indolent and lifeless manner; or if, in the opposite extreme, they affect an idle display of their own abilities or eloquence, instead of those unaffected strains which command the reason, and warm the heart; if the congregation assembled shall forget the ends of their coming; if instead of reverence and devotion they discover indifference and inattention; if instead of those decent composes of body prescribed by the church, they indulge themselves in all the variety of lazy postures, or turn this sacred place into a scene of untimely mirth and wantonness. If these things, I say, be done, what, in the name of God, what shall we be bettered by our most

excellent institutions?—In truth, they cease to be good, when they are ill administered, or ill attended to. And the most defective forms of worship, when seriously and solemnly performed, are of more value in the sight of God, than the most perfect, when abused or neglected.

Lastly, Let us, above all, take care that our devout exercises may have their proper effect on our lives and actions. Without this, our strictest observance of them, either in public or in private, is vain, and even an abomination in the sight of God. Their design, we have seen, is for the improvement of our minds in piety and virtue: if they have not these effects upon us, it were even scandalous to boast that we enjoy the benefit of them. By this, we stand self-condemned; and avow ourselves wicked, in spite of the best assistances. Peace, and piety, and virtue, are the ends of all religion; and our Saviour's declaration authorizeth us to affirm, that one form of worship can only be preferred to another, as it contributes more to these great ends. Let the excellence of ours, therefore, shine out in its effects: so shall men know it by its fruits. As we have the best assistances, so let us make the best use of them. This will, indeed, be no imaginary distinction. It is a noble pre-eminence, to be the first in virtue. So shall we truly become, above all others, *God's peculiar people*, when above all others we become *zealous of good works*.

S E R M O N LXXXIII.

By Dr. SAMUEL CLARKE,
Of St. James's.

On the Nature and End of the Sabbath

MARK, ii. 27.

And he said unto them, the sabbath was made for man, and not man for the sabbath.

IT is very remarkable in the whole history of our Saviour, that in all cases where neither any natural necessity nor moral obligation intervened to the contrary, there he was constantly most exact and nice, in fulfilling every particular, even

even of the ceremonial law. Thus when he came to John the Baptist; though, having no sin, he had no need of the baptism of repentance; and John accordingly *forbid him, saying, I have need to be baptized of thee, and comest thou to me?* yet he insisted upon it, saying, *suffer it to be so now; for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness* (Matt. iii. 15.); but, on the contrary, wherever any real necessity of nature, or any moral obligation, any work of goodness, mercy, or charity, came in competition; there he was always as zealous, that the work of goodness or charity should take place of any positive rite or ceremony whatsoever. Thus when the pharisees reproached him, for conversing familiarly with, and instructing persons legally unclean: he replies, *Go ye and learn what that meaneth, I will have mercy and not sacrifice.* (Matt. ix. 13.) And when the ruler of the synagogue reviled him for healing a diseased person upon the sabbath-day, and maliciously represented it to the people as a breach of the command given to keep that day holy; he answers him, *Thou hypocrite, doth not each one of you on the sabbath loose his ox or his ass from the stall, and lead him away to watering? and ought not this woman, being a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan hath bound, lo, these eighteen years, be loosed from this bond on the sabbath-day?* (Luke, xiii. 15.) And, in the history which occasioned the words of my text, when the pharisees were angry at Jesus's disciples, for plucking a few ears of corn on the sabbath-day (Mar. ii. 24.); our Lord answers them by giving an instance out of the history of the Old Testament, by which it appeared that in all times, even under the law, all merely ritual and ceremonial institutions always gave place to the just and real necessities of life. Immediately after which, he adds in the words of the text, as a general ground or reason of the thing itself, whereof he had just before alleged an instance in practice; the *sabbath*, saith he, *was made for man, and not man for the sabbath.* That is, duties of a ritual nature, and of positive appointment only, do not, like those moral virtues, which are of intrinsic, eternal, and unalterable obligation, indispensably oblige in all cases and in all circumstances whatsoever; but were appointed of God, only for the present use of man, to be subservient and assisting to the more conve-

nient practice of the great duties of religion.

From these words therefore of our Saviour, I shall, in the following discourse, consider the nature and ends of the original institution of the sabbath, and to what degree and purpose it still continues obligatory among Christians. In general, as it is absolutely necessary in the first foundation of religion, that we know distinctly whom we are to worship, and in what manner; so it is necessary likewise, in the nature of things, that some portion of time be allowed for instructing ourselves in the knowledge of our duty, and for the practice peculiarly of that especial part of it, which consists in the public acknowledgment and solemn worship of God. And herein consists the general morality of the sabbath, and the eternal reason of its having perpetually a place among the unalterable commandments of the moral law. For as necessary as it is, that religion should be at all preserved in the world, so necessary it is that some time should be set apart for men's instruction in the will of God, and for their solemnizing his worship.

But to be more distinct and particular; the ends for which the sabbath was originally instituted, and for which the command was from time to time renewed, were principally as follows:

I. That men might continually commemorate the works of creation, and acknowledging the one true God and author of all things, might praise him perpetually for the things that he has made. (Rev. iv. 11.) The worship paid to God in heaven is thus represented to St. John in his vision; the whole multitude of the heavenly host fall down before him that sits on the throne, saying, *Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory, and honour, and power; for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are, and were created.* This is the employment of saints and angels, in the eternal sabbath in heaven; and that, upon earth, the praises of God may be celebrated on the same account, is the original foundation of the institution of the sabbath. *And God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it; because that in it he had rested from all his work, which God created and made:* (Gen. ii. 3.) Which reason is again repeated: *For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, and the sea, and all that in them is, and rested*

rested the seventh day; wherefore the Lord blessed the sabbath-day and hallowed it, (Exod. xx. 11.) It is here to be observed, that the word rested, is by no means to be understood literally, as if the creating of things had been any pains or labour to God: for it is absurd, that any thing should give any trouble to omnipotence. *By the word of the Lord were the heavens made, and all the host of them by the breath of his mouth; he spake the word, and they were made; he commanded, and they stood fast.* The meaning is: he made them all with as great ease, as if it had been no action at all, but merely a word speaking. His resting therefore after it, is, (I say) by no means to be understood literally; but God's resting signifies merely, that the things were finished which he intended to make at that time, and that he then proceeded no further. Likewise, things being made in six days, is not, that there was any thing in the nature of things which required that space of time for their production. For the production of things in six days is as miraculous, as the producing of them in one single moment; and the producing of them in one moment, had been just as easy to God, as the creating them in six days. But it is only for the sake of our greater distinction of conception, that things were digested in that particular order and portion of time. And our perpetual returns of praises to God for the things that he has made, offered up to him every sabbath, are a mark or distinguishing character of the worshippers of the true God; a declaration or continual professing of ourselves to be servants of the one almighty and true God, the Father or Author of all things, the maker of heaven and earth: in opposition to the infidelity of atheists, the superstition of polytheists, and the irreligious worship of all the idolatrous nations of the earth. *Verily my sabbaths ye shall keep; for it is a sign between me and you—that ye may know that I am the Lord—It is a sign between me and the children of Israel for ever; for in six days the Lord made heaven and earth.* Exod. xxxi. 13. 17. Of ignorant and profane men, some have imagined the world to exist by necessity of nature; not considering, that in what arises from necessity, there can be no variety or distinction: and these persons cannot but be totally void of all religion. Others have fan-

cied the world to have been framed originally by mere chance; not considering, that chance is nothing, and can do nothing, being a mere empty word or sound: and these likewise must needs be absolutely without religion. Others have persuaded themselves, that the sun, moon, and stars were Gods, or the habitations of Gods, or the powers that governed the world: and these were the idolatrous worshippers of the host of heaven. Concerning which crime, Job thus expresses himself with his accustomed eloquence, *If I beheld the sun when it shined, or the moon walking in brightness; and my heart hath been secretly enticed, or my mouth hath kissed my hand; this also were an iniquity to be punished by the judge, for I should have denied the God that is above.* (Ch. xxxi. 26.) The great preservative against every fault of this kind, either idolatrous or atheistical, is the consideration that the whole universe, and all things therein contained, are the creation of God: that the moon and stars themselves are all of them the work of his hands; and that it is our heavenly Father which causeth his sun (so our Saviour emphatically expresses it), *he causeth his sun to shine on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust.* This is what even by reason itself may be strictly proved, to those who are capable of attending to it: *his eternal power and godhead are clearly seen by the things that are made.* (Rom. i. 20.) By revelation, the same great truth is clearly confirmed to persons of all capacities. And the first institution of the sabbath was on purpose, that men periodically celebrating the creation of God, might thereby be preserved from irreligion and idolatry. *Lest thou lift up thine eyes unto heaven, and when thou seest the sun and the moon and the stars, even all the host of heaven, shouldst be driven to worship them and serve them, which the Lord thy God hath divided unto all nations under the whole heaven.* (Deut. iv. 19.) This was the idolatry mankind was apt to run into, in the early ages of the world; and it continues still among some barbarous nations even at this day. But the more prevailing vice in these latter ages, among men of corrupt minds in civilized nations, are atheistical notions, of necessity, fate, and nature. The proper remedy against both these great evils, of idolatry and atheism, is a serious consideration of the manifold

wisdom

wisdom and excellency of the works of God, which shew forth the praise and glory of their almighty Creator. *O all ye works of the Lord, bless ye the Lord, praise him and magnify him for ever. Praise ye him, sun and moon; praise him, all ye stars of light;—mountains and all hills; beasts and all cattle; fire and hail, snow and vapour, storms and wind, fulfilling his word.* (Ps. cxlviii. 3.) It is a very elegant and expressive figure of speech, to represent all, even inanimate creatures, as themselves praising God; because the contemplation of them affords to reasonable men, perpetual grounds of praising him. I have been the longer upon this first head, because this original reason of the institution of the sabbath is of eternal and unchangeable consideration.

II. Another reason, which was added upon occasion of renewing this institution to the Jews, was, that they might commemorate their deliverance out of the land of Egypt, which to that people was as it were a new creation. *Remember that thou wast a servant in the land of Egypt, and that the Lord brought thee out thence by a stretched-out arm; therefore the Lord thy God commanded thee to keep the sabbath day.* (Deut. v. 15.) This additional reason was peculiar to the nation of the Jews only; and consequently so were the additional circumstances, which were then annexed, with regard to the manner of performing the duty. Of which kind, was that absolute and strict rest from every sort of work whatsoever, which was a proper commemoration of their deliverance from that great bondage, wherein they had in an unparalleled manner been obliged to work and to serve with rigour. And because it was a manifest contempt of this great deliverance, and a presumptuously wilful despising of a plain command of God, then immediately and expressly given to that people; therefore, however small the offence may seem as to the matter of it, yet (which is always the main circumstance of aggravation) it being altogether inexcusable in point of wilful presumption, the man in the wilderness, who did but gather sticks upon the sabbath-day, was by God's especial direction commanded to be put to death. (Numb. xv. 35.) It was a presumptuous contempt of that express part of the command given at that time to that peo-

ple. *Ye shall kindle no fire throughout your habitations upon the sabbath-day; whosoever doth work therein, shall be put to death.* (Exod. xxxv. 2, 3.) But this rigorous exacting of an absolute and strict rest, was, as I have said, peculiar to the nation of the Jews only; as is evident from the reason before-mentioned, relating to their deliverance out of Egypt and is still more clear from the words of St. Paul, (Col. ii. 16.) *Let no man judge you in meat or in drink, or in respect of the new-moon or of the sabbath-day; which are a shadow of things to come, but the body (or substance) is of Christ:* and from the words of our Saviour himself, immediately following the text: *The Son of Man is Lord also of the sabbath.*

III. Another additional reason upon renewing the institution of the sabbath to the Jews was, that servants, and even cattle appointed for labour, might have a proportionable time of rest. This reason is expressed in the fourth commandment; and again more particularly, (Exod. xxiii. 12.) *That thine ox and thine ass may rest, and the son of thine handmaid, and the stranger, may be refreshed.* And this reason is partly ceremonial, partly moral. So far as the commandment of giving rest to servants was a memorial to the Israelites of their having been themselves servants in Egypt; so far it was part of the ritual law, and its obligation extends not to other nations. But so far as the reason of the commandment is founded in humanity, and is opposite to cruelty, severity, and rigour; so far it is an eternal part of the moral law, and continues to be of perpetual obligation. Unreasonable severity, in exacting from those under our power more than they are well able to perform, is for ever a breach of this commandment, and a temper altogether inconsistent with the spirit and character of a good man. *A righteous man, saith the scripture, regardeth the life even of his beasts.* (Prov. xii. 10.) And it is not without its proper significance; in order to shew men what spirit and temper they should be of; that God, in the giving of this commandment, condescends to make mention even of cattle; and that our Saviour assures us, that not a sparrow falls to the ground, without the notice of our Father which is in heaven.

And now from this account of the rea-

sons of the original institution, and of the repeated renewals of the command concerning the sabbath, it is very easy to understand, how far and in what sense it is a perpetual commandment, and to what degrees and purposes it still continues obligatory among Christians.

The moral part of the sabbath; that is, so far as it is a commandment enjoining the virtue of humanity, or of allowing time to those who are under our power, to rest from the labours of their worldly employment; and so far as it is, according to the original reason of its institution in Paradise, a time set apart for the religious commemorating of God's work of creation (Gen. ii. 3.), and praising him for the things that he has made, and serving and worshipping him as the maker of all things; this moral part (I say) of the sabbath, is of eternal and unchangeable obligation. For the solemn public worship of God cannot possibly be performed, without particular times be set apart for the performing it, and for the instructing men in the knowledge of their duty. The more carefully this is done, the more acceptable to God are our days of devotion. And they who, by the habitual practice of virtue, preserve constantly upon their minds a sense of God and religion in all the actions of their lives, may be truly said, in the Christian sense, to keep a perpetual sabbath. Upon which account, both the land of Canaan, wherein the Israelites were to serve God *without fear, in holiness and righteousness before him all the days of their lives*; and the heavenly Canaan, whereof the other was but a type; are by St. Paul figuratively represented under the notion of an eternal sabbath or rest to the people of God, in a very elegant allusion: without attending to which, there is considerable difficulty in understanding the manner both of his expression and argument: *Although* (saith he) *the works* (the works of creation) *were finished from the foundation of the world—and God did rest the seventh day from all his works*; (Heb. iv. 3.) yet this was not the true sabbath, but only, as he elsewhere expresses it, *it was a shadow of things to come*. (Col. ii. 17.) The true sabbath, or rest to the people of the Jews, was their entering into the promised land, and therein resting for ever from the labours they had underwent

in Egypt and in the wilderness: and this, he tells us, is the sense of the word, rest, in those places, where God threatened and sware to the unbelieving Israelites, *that they should not enter into his rest*. (Ch. iii. 11. 18.) But then still he goes on, and tells us further, that even this final rest of theirs, *the promised land itself*; even this also was still but a type of a further and better rest, even the *eternal sabbath in heaven*. For if Joshua, says he, (ch. iv. 7, 8.) *had given them rest, then would not the scripture afterward have spoken of another day, as it does in David, saying, again, to-day, after so long a time. There remaineth therefore* (infers the Apostle) *there remaineth still a further rest* (or sabbath) *to the people of God*, (ver. 9.) that is, an eternal rest in heaven, from sin, and from temptation, and from all misery: for so he goes on, (ver. 10.) *for he that is entered into his rest, he also has ceased from his own works, as God did from his: let us labour therefore to enter into that rest, lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief*. By attending to, and observing this allusion, there is very great light given to the apostle's whole discourse in that 4th chapter to the Hebrews, which otherwise is difficult to be distinctly and clearly understood. But to proceed.

As the moral part of the commandment concerning the sabbath is of perpetual obligation; so the ritual or instituted part, which had relation (as a particular memorial) to the deliverance of the Jews out of Egypt, is abolished by the Gospel. Insomuch that St. Paul, in the place before cited, (Col. iii. 16, 17.) among ordinances of meats and drinks, and new-moons, and other shadows of things to come, reckons up also the sabbath-days. But then, instead of the Jewish sabbath, there succeeded, by the appointment and practice of the apostles, the commemoration of our Lord's resurrection. Which coming to pass upon the first day of the week, the Christian Lord's day, instead of the seventh day which was the Jewish sabbath; it was accordingly, from thenceforth, kept on the first day of the week. Thus we read (Acts, xx. 7.) that *upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul preached unto them*. And (1 Cor. xvi. 1, 2.) concerning the collection for the saints: *upon the first day of the week, saith he, let every*

every

every one of you lay by him in store, as God has prospered him. And (Rev. i. 10.) it is by St. John expressed by name: I was, saith he, in the spirit on the Lord's day.

The manner in which it ought to be observed among Christians, is, in attending the public worship of God, in hearing the word, in reading the Scriptures; in instructing and assisting those over whom we have any kind of influence, in the knowledge and practice of their duty. In a word, it is to be spent in works of necessity, and in works of charity; and in whatsoever tends, without superstition and without affectation, to the real honour of God, and to the true interest and promoting of religion and virtue in the world. Concerning works of necessity, our Saviour in the text, upon occasion of his his disciples plucking the ears of corn on the sabbath-day, expressly exempts us from the preciseness of the pharisaical hypocrisy: *the sabbath, saith he, was made for man, and not man for the sabbath.* Concerning works of charity; these are so direct and proper, so great and principal a part of true religion, that, as if it were on purpose to shew these to be even the most acceptable part of that rest which God commanded on the sabbath, our Saviour seems, in the whole course of his ministry, to have industriously as it were sought for all possible occasions of doing things of this nature upon the sabbath-day, that he might thence take opportunity to reprove the false notions which the pharisees had entertained, both of God's resting from his work, and of his commanding them to rest from theirs. The careful observing of which matter will clear to us the sense of an expression of our Saviour, which otherwise is not obvious to be understood. When the Jews sought to slay him, because he had healed a lame man on the sabbath-day; the reply he makes to them is this, *my Father worketh hitherto, and I work.* (John, v. 17.) His meaning is: ye have a very wrong notion of the true sabbatical rest which God has commanded: from his work of creation, God does indeed now rest: but in acts of providence, preservation, government, and doing good to his creatures, in these things my Father worketh hitherto, and will work for ever; and in these instances I also work, and every good man works, both on the sabbath-day and continually.

The extremes to be avoided are, an affected judaical or pharisaical preciseness on the one hand, which usually proceeds either from hypocrisy, or from want of understanding rightly the true nature of religion: and on the other hand, the worse and more dangerous extreme is, that habit of spending any part of the Lord's day in looseness and idleness, in gaming and debauchery, which has been encouraged by popery, and which has, to so many persons, been the corruption of their principles, and the entire ruin of their morals. From which and all other, &c.

SERMON LXXXIV.

By ARCHBISHOP SECKER.

On Ash Wednesday.

GALATIANS, v. 24.

And they that are Christ's, have crucified the flesh, with the affections and lusts.

THIS expression, *crucifying the flesh*, may probably seem to most, when they first hear it, or attend to it, a very strange one: as, no doubt, numbers of others in scripture do. But a little consideration will shew, that there is no cause to censure them, or be offended at them. For amidst the multiplicity of languages that are in the world, and the various nations, tempers, and circumstances of the people, who are bred up to use them; it is unavoidable, but there will be in each many ways of speaking, which though easy and familiar by custom to one part of mankind, must yet, to the rest, appear harsh and unaccountable. This is the case even of neighbouring countries in our own times: much more then must it be expected in those tongues, of which the vulgar use hath long since failed, and which formerly expressed the sentiments of distant nations, inspired both by the age and the climate they lived in, with a different turn of thought and stile. Hence proceeds the surprising warmth and boldness of figure, the abrupt transitions, the sudden lofty flights of the eastern writers and speakers, utterly contrary to the cool and regular genius of the European languages. And amongst the former, the compositions of the Jews must of course have a peculiar tincture and propriety of their own; not only because

they were prohibited, for good reasons, all needless commerce with other lands; but chiefly because divine revelation delivered to them such doctrines and precepts, and consequently such terms, as the heathen had not; which must likewise greatly increase in number by frequent references to their own articles of faith, observances, and sacred books. When Christianity was published to the world, here was again a new set of discoveries and ideas, added to the preceding: which being first communicated in Hebrew, were thence transfused into Greek by the apostles, addressing themselves to the Gentiles. Thus was the stile of the New Testament produced: which being as literally translated, and closely imitated, as it well could (for the nature of the thing required strictness), the same forms of speech have been derived down into the modern tongues of Christian countries. And so it hath come to pass by a kind of necessity, that, in discourses on religion, words, meanings, constructions, images, occur, extremely remote from the common idiom of the language on other occasions. And these, weak persons are apt to mistake, artful disputants to pervert, and unlearned or unfair affecters of wit and free thought to ridicule; though originally they were of plain signification, and are still, when understood, full of good sense and beauty.

Thus, crucifying, or as the apostle elsewhere puts it (Col. iii. 5.), mortifying the flesh, is a phrase far out of the road of our daily conversation, and of our reading on subjects of business and entertainment: from whence it easily happens, that the superstitious misapprehend, and the profane despise it; though indeed it denotes a reasonable, a necessary duty, and describes that duty, not only in a strong, but elegant manner. To shew these things clearly, I shall,

I. Explain to you the rise and general intention of this way of speaking.

II. Specify more distinctly the nature of the duty designed to be taught by it.

III. Shew you how strictly our belonging to Christ obliges us to practice that doctrine.

I. I shall explain to you the rise and general intention of this way of speaking in scripture.

Now the words, flesh and spirit, though employed by the writers of the New Tes-

tament in different senses, according to the subject of which they treat, are yet commonly expressions of the moral state and character of man; the dispositions of his heart toward piety or sin. Spirit is the principle of reason and religion: flesh of appetite and passion. Every one feels in himself both right and wrong inclinations. The former our conscience approves; and therefore pursuing them would, on that account alone, be properly called, *walking after the spirit*; (Rom. viii. 4.) *that inward man, which naturally delighteth in the law of God*. (Rom. vii. 22.) But a much stronger ground for it is, that the Divine Spirit hath not only revealed to us the whole rule of life, and the most powerful motives to observe it, but is continually present to our minds, exciting and strengthening us, if we permit him, to every good work. On the other hand, *all flesh having corrupted his way before God*, (Gen. vi. 11, 12.) sinners may be justly said to walk after the flesh, because they live conformably to the wicked customs of the world. But the true foundation of the phrase is, that this *corruptible body* (Wisd. ix. 15.) subjects the fallen children of Adam perpetually, by its irregular propensities, to a variety of temptations, hard to be overcome. And therefore, even heathen authors have represented it as the principal source of moral evil: no wonder then, that those of scripture do, on fuller knowledge of the case.

But in St. Paul more especially, the flesh means our vicious tendencies; not only those to sensual indulgence, but the whole system of them. Thus, ver. 13. of this chapter: *Brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not your liberty for an occasion to the flesh*; that is, to any blameable purpose. But the particular blameable use, which he had in view, was that of uncharitable contention. For it follows immediately. *But if ye bite and devour one another, take heed that ye be not consumed one of another*. Again, ver. 19, having said, that *the works of the flesh are manifest*, he proceeds to reckon amongst them, not only *adultery and lasciviousness*, but *variance, envy, strife, sedition*. And the *fruits of the spirit*, opposed to these, (ver. 22.) are not only *temperance*, but *long suffering, peace, goodness, faith, or fidelity, meekness*.

Farther; because there is a connexion and

and sympathy between the various dispositions of the same kind, whether moral or immoral, each adding vigour and strength to the other: the several vices, to which mankind is prone, are described in God's word, as uniting into and forming a living body, hence denominated *the body of sin*, or of *the lusts of the flesh* (Col. ii. 11.); of which every criminal inclination is a member. Thus, when the apostle had enjoined Christians to *mortify their members, which are upon the earth* (Col. iii. 5.); he instantly explains himself to mean the parts of this figurative body of sin, which he goes on to enumerate; *covetousness, anger, fornication, uncleanness, malice, blasphemy*.

And, in consequence of this, because not only the nature of all men is tainted originally, but the conduct of most men hath, in some respects at least, been habitually unjustifiable; therefore the sins which they have indulged, considered in the manner above mentioned, as united into one organized body, are also stiled in scripture *the old man*; in opposition to that *new man*, or blessed change of temper and behaviour, which the gospel was designed to produce. And however singular the former of these phrases may appear; the latter, which in itself is equally so, that of becoming a new man, is both frequent in our common speech, and warranted by the politest of classical authors.

This expression therefore having taken place, the amendment of our hearts and actions is sometimes denoted by laying aside or *putting off this old man*. Thus, (Eph. iv. 22.) *That ye put off, concerning the former conversation, the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts; and put on the new man, which is created according to God* (that is, according to the image of God), *in righteousness and true holiness*. And because our gracious Redeemer was a perfect example of these, putting on the new man is elsewhere called *putting on the Lord Jesus Christ* (Rom. xiii. 14. Gal. iii. 27): a mode of speech fully vindicated by the ancient usage of the Greek tongue, in which the New Testament was written. For in that, *putting on any person* signified forming ones-self by his character, and imitating his manner.

At other times, this intire change of affections, will, and demeanour, is ex-

pressed more strongly. We are said to be *dead to sin*, and *raised up again to walk in newness of life* (Rom. vi. 2. 4.): which means, to be separated for ever from bad habits and customs, and entering into a different state, and course of thinking and acting; in which *the former things are passed away, and all things are made new*. (Rev. xxi. 4, 5.) The promises indeed of this renovation on our part, and of grace to accomplish it, and future happiness to reward it, on God's part, are first made in baptism: which therefore the scripture (John, iii. 3—7.) calls our new birth to this new life. But then, it is only by continual care (if Providence allows us time) to grow in grace, and become every day more completely dead to all transgression, and alive to all duty, that we shall arrive at the maturity requisite for our acceptance.

Farther yet; when the word of God intends to give us the most awakening sense, how intire our change must be, and with how unremitted a resolution we must arm ourselves against every bad inclination; then the expression chosen is, not that of dying to sin, but of mortifying, killing it. For the original signification of the words, translated mortify, is not the now common one, of keeping under, and treating with some austerity, but of destroying, putting to death: as where the apostle saith, *if through the spirit ye do mortify the deeds of the body* (unlawful indulgences), *ye shall live* (Rom. vii. 13.): and in the passage already cited, *mortify therefore your members, which are upon the earth*. In pursuance of which mortal enmity between religion and wickedness, every serious believer considers himself as a *soldier of Christ* (2 Tim. ii. 3, 4.), whose whole life is to be a warfare against *those lusts which war against the soul*. (1 Pet. ii. 11.)

And lastly, because the great end of our Saviour's incarnation and death was to engage us in this good fight, and enable us to obtain the victory; therefore overcoming and sacrificing to him our unlawful desires, is, by an elegant allusion to the manner of his death (which was painful and slow, like our extirpation of them), called crucifying them; not only here in the text, but in another parallel one: *knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should*

should not serve sin. (Romans, vi. 6.) Whence also our apostle saith farther, that *by the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by the example of his sufferings, and the grace which they have procured, the world is crucified unto him, and he unto the world.* (Gal. vi. 14.) He regards it no more than the Jews did our Saviour, when they condemned him to the most ignominious torments, but hates it mortally, and despises it utterly, so far as it is sinful: and is content, that, in return, it should hate and despise him, rather than comply with its wicked customs.

This then is the true Christian mortification. And the figures, describing it, are indeed remarkably bold and full of energy: but they are accurate, instructive, animating; and, alas! but too necessary, to convince unthinking and unwilling creatures as we are (prone to explain away into nothing every precept we can), of the zeal and severity with which we are to extirpate all that is faulty within our souls. The commands of our blessed Lord himself carry in them the same force: *If our right hand offends us, cut it off; if our right eye, to pluck it out* (Matth. v. 29, 30. xvii. 8, 9. Mark, ix. 43. 45. 47.): if any desire we feel will be a probable occasion of our falling, to suppress it, however dear; if any action we are engaged in, to quit it, however advantageous in other respects. And the reason he adds, admits of no reply. *It is better for thee to enter into life maimed, than having two hands or two eyes, to be cast into hell fire:* it is better to undergo the most painful self-denial here, and be recompensed with heavenly felicity hereafter, than to enjoy the *pleasures of sin for a season* (Heb. xi. 25.), and suffer the vengeance of the Almighty for ever.

Having now explained the rise and general intention of the principal phrases of this sort in scripture, I proceed,

II. To specify more distinctly the nature of the duty designed to be taught by them.

And here you cannot fail to perceive at first sight, that harsh treatment of our bodily frame, only for the sake of treating it harshly, is no part of Christian mortification, or Christian duty. It is indeed a practice contrary to reason, and no less to scripture. For St. Paul saith no man, that is, no wise man, *ever hated his own flesh.* (Eph. v. 29.) Yet the opi-

nion, that such things are in themselves acceptable to God, hath not only been common in false religions, but crept into the true: and both furnished unbelievers with an objection against it, and misled believers very unhappily. For they who fancy that exercising rigour on their persons hath any good in it, separate from the good uses to which it may contribute, are some of them led to fancy also, that the farther they carry it the better; till they hurt, perhaps ruin, their healths, disorder their understandings, or however sour their tempers: while others conceive that there is very great merit in a very little suffering, and consequently persuade themselves, that God will readily excuse the smaller faults of a behaviour not quite so moral as it should be, on their punctual performance of their higher duties, as they esteem them; though, in truth, not only imaginary, but often of little more than imaginary hardship. And thus, whereas common sinners are open to remorse of conscience, which there is hope may, sooner or later, through the grace of God, amend them; these, on the contrary, proceed self-applauded, and fully persuaded of their title to a distinguished share of divine favour. On which account our Saviour tells the pharisees, men of austerity in some respects, and wonderful exactness in little matters, that *the publicans and the harlots shall go into the kingdom of heaven before them.* (Matthew, xxi. 3.)

Not that Christians, of more abstemious lives than ordinary, are therefore to be condemned as pharisees and hypocrites; or derided, as weak and superstitious. Every one is bound to employ such means for his preservation from sin, and advancement in piety and virtue, as either God's word hath prescribed, or his own reason and experience recommend. Now some may find rules to be useful or necessary, which to others would be neither. Some again may rashly censure what they would do much better to imitate. And all persons, but especially all who live in ease and plenty, should be attentive to *keep their bodies in subjection* (1 Cor. ix. 27.); not harassing them as enemies, but ruling and providing for them as servants, in such manner as to make them both willing to obey, and able to perform their work. They should watch over their natural fondness for pleasure, and

tendency

tendency to follow the customs of the world; not with unreasonable scrupulousness, but with religious prudence: learn to suspect their favourite inclinations, and the opinions that countenance them: check themselves in proportion as they grow eager; stop and look round them with care: never adventure to the extremity of what is lawful, but in all dubious cases, lean to the undoubtedly safer side: be moderate in the most allowable gratifications of this world, and delight principally in cultivating and improving those pious and virtuous affections, which alone can make them meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light (Col. i. 12.); of a happiness intirely spiritual, and abstracted from flesh and blood.

But then, while we observe this caution in regard to worldly objects, we must be careful also, on the other hand, that we carry it not to dangerous or extravagant lengths; that we seem not unthankful to; or suspicious of him, *who hath given us richly all things to enjoy* (1 Tim. vi. 17.); that we disguise not religion by putting it in a melancholy and forbidding dress; that we be not betrayed by the restraints under which we lay ourselves, either into vain self-opinion and spiritual pride, or a rigidness of temper, very unsuitable to the gentle spirit of the Christian profession: but particularly, that we forbear to condemn, or even despise, our brethren of more seeming latitude; who, it may be, under the appearance of a freer life (which was our Saviour's own case, *for he came eating and drinking* (Matth. xi. 19. Luke, vii. 34.)), preserve really and inwardly a stricter guard over their thoughts, words, and actions, than we do. And in general, all persons ought to take heed, that while they are watching against the approach of one sort of sins, those of another do not find a ready admission. We are willing enough to keep at ever so great a distance from the faults to which we have little or no inclination; and often affect to make our zeal in that respect remarkable: but then perhaps more favourite vices have easy entrance into our breasts, and take firm possession of them. We are shocked, for instance, and with much cause, at the monstrous and ruinous eagerness for pleasure, the profligate and unprecedented contempt of religion, that prevails in the world; our behaviour, on these heads, is unblameable, exemplary,

and we value ourselves upon it beyond bounds. Yet, possibly, all the while, we indulge ourselves to the full another way; are unjust and fraudulent, or selfish and unreasonable, or penurious and hard-hearted, or censorious and unforgiving, or peevish and ill-tempered; make every one about us uneasy, and those chiefly whose happiness ought to be our first care. This is applauding ourselves for being fortified, where the enemy is not likely to make an attack; and leaving the places that are most exposed, quite undefended. Every one therefore ought to study the weak parts of his own heart and conduct, and spend the main of his attention upon these; that so not only a wrong inclination or two may be rooted up (which if left to themselves would scarcely grow), or may be sacrificed in favour of others as bad, but the whole body of sin be destroyed; the flesh, the principle of evil, with all its affections and lusts, nailed to the cross of Christ.

And this duty of mortification is no more confined to one season, than to one sin. The practice of it either must be constant, or will be fruitless. The time of Lent indeed hath been more especially appropriated to it: not that we should think the shew, or the reality, of a little more exactness than ordinary for a few weeks (productive perhaps only of ill humour), so meritorious, that when we have once got it over, we may live almost as we please, till the unwelcome days return, when we are to atone afresh for our past offences, and so make way for the commission of future ones. For, as the Son of Sirach observes, *He that washeth himself after the touching of a dead body, if he touch it again, what availeth his washing? So is it with a man, that fasteth for his sins, and goeth again and doth the same; who will hear his prayer, or what doth his humbling profit him?* (Ecclus. xxiv. 25, 26.) Our great concern is to mortify all irregular desires with such incessant care, that there may be as little need, as little room as possible, to distinguish one season from another in that respect. But because we are strangely apt to postpone a work, generally disagreeable in proportion as it is necessary, our church hath wisely directed, that the negligent (and we all are such in some measure) should now be more solemnly called to consider their ways, afflict their souls

souls for their transgressions, and renew the intermitted discipline which is requisite to make their hearts better. This is our true business at present. Methods of keeping Lent, which end with it, and leave behind them no durable effect, cannot be of much use; and may be fatal, by deceiving us into a false security, and forgetfulness of what I proposed to shew you:

III. That our Christian profession strongly binds us to mortify continually every immoral appetite and passion. *They that are Christ's have crucified the flesh, with the affections and lusts.*

Instead of this, the apostle might have said (like the philosophers of his own and preceding times), they who are truly rational beings, who see the beauty of virtue and deformity of vice, who feel the pleasures and the pains of the moral sense, who form just notions of the real good and evil of man, who are ambitious of imitating their Creator, and acquiring his favour in their present state of existence, and perhaps a future one: but in saying, *they who are Christ's*, he hath said all this, and much more. Christianity comprehends every consideration of nature and reason in the fullest manner; and as they are all insufficient, some too speculative and un-affecting, some too disputable and uncertain, adds others of inestimable value, peculiar to itself. A heathen may want almost intirely, and must want in a great degree, both the means of learning what mankind is most deeply interested in, and motives and power to practise what he had learned: a Christian, allowed to read and hear the word of God, cannot, without inexcusable negligence; and of them to whom much is given, much will be required. (Luke, xii. 48.) *Through Christ, who hath enlightened us, we know all things* (1 John, ii. 20.); *through Christ, which strengtheneth us, we can do all things.* (Phil. iv. 13.) Through Christ, who died for us, what we do shall be rewarded, though deserving nothing, with eternal life. And thus hath the grace of God, which bringeth salvation, not only taught but enabled us, *denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, to live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world.* (Tit. ii. 11, 12.) They, who are Christ's in name only, bind themselves to this; they, who are in reality his, perform it. *If any man have not the spirit of Christ, he is none of*

his (Rom. viii. 3.): and the fruit of the Spirit, we are told immediately before the text, and through the whole scripture, are the pious movements of a good heart, and the actions of a good life. Our blessed Lord gave himself for us, that he might sanctify and cleanse us, and present us to himself holy, and without blemish. (Eph. x. 25, 26, 27.) If then we labour not to become such, we frustrate, so far as our own concern reaches, his gracious intentions, and make his sufferings vain. If we crucify not our affections and lusts, *we crucify him afresh, and put him to open shame* (Heb. vi. 6.); pour contempt on his glorious undertaking ourselves, and expose it to the scorn of others: the consequence of which will be, that, as *while we profess to know him, in works we deny him* (Tit. i. 16.), so will he in the day of judgment profess to us, *I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.* (Matth. vii. 23.) Still it should be observed, that so far both good and bad Christians are his, as to be always under his dominion. *None of us liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself*, exempted from his authority; *whether we live or die, we are the Lord's* (Rom. xiv. 7, 8.); but the wicked continue under his government, just as upon earth rebels continue subjects; not entitled to benefits from their prince, but liable justly to sorer punishments than his other enemies. Think then, will you be *Christ's at his coming* (1 Cor. xv. 23.), only to have *vengeance taken of you in flaming fire* (2 Thess. i. 8.), or to *enter with him into his glory*? (Luke, xxiv. 26.) If the latter be your choice, the only way to it is, that you think it not too much to crucify your flesh figuratively, renounce and destroy your forbidden desires, however painful it be, for him; since he thought it not too much to let his flesh literally be crucified for you. And if you will make sure of doing this at all, you must do it immediately.

Perhaps you will say, we hope it is done already; for the text assures us, all believers have done it. But observe, at that time almost all professed believers were real ones; for they had no temptation to make a false profession: and in general, speculative believers were practical ones; else they would never have suffered what they did. But in our times, the case is much altered. And in all times,

times, the true method of arguing is, not, *we are Christ's*, and therefore we have crucified our affections and lusts; but, *we have crucified our affections and lusts*, and therefore *we are Christ's*. Our faith must be proved from our works; not our works from our faith. *By their fruits ye shall know them*, is the rule (Matth. vii. 20.); and by those we must know our own state, as well as that of others. But supposing we have cause to believe it good, have we not greater cause to be sensible it is not perfect? And should we not be striving continually to make it more so? *They that are Christ's*, the apostle tells us, *have crucified the flesh*. But he doth not tell us, they have done it so effectually and so completely as they ought. On the contrary he tells us, that he himself had *not yet attained*, but was still *pressing on toward the mark*. (Phil. iii. 12, 13, 14.) And surely we should be doing it without ceasing. Unless we are careful to advance, we shall be driven back; unless we pursue our enemy to destruction, though put to flight, he will return; though wounded as it were *to death*, *his deadly wound will be healed* (Rev. xiii. 3.); and gradually, if not suddenly, his empire may become more absolute, and our condition more deplorable, than ever. At least he will be perpetually annoying us, disturbing our peace, taking away our comfort, darkening our prospects. Nor shall we be losers in this life only, by neglect of going on to perfection; but in the next also, the less complete the victory is, the smaller will be the reward; and *they who have sown sparingly, shall reap also sparingly*. (2 Cor. ix. 6.) Let us therefore sow plentifully the seeds of every virtue; and extirpate with such diligence every *root of bitterness*, that there may be the freest room and the fullest nourishment for every grace of the Christian life to flourish, and be fruitful. *Of ourselves indeed we can do nothing*. (John, xv. 5.) But this is far from being a just plea for stopping where we are: since *God is able to make all grace abound toward us; that we having always all sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work*. (2 Cor. ix. 8.) Provided then we apply to him, by the means he hath appointed and engaged to bless, humble faith, earnest prayer, strict vigilance, and constant use of his holy ordinances, we shall not fail to ex-

perience the truth of his promise: *They that wait upon the Lord, shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings, as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; they shall walk, and not faint*. (Is. xl. 31.)

S E R M O N LXXXV.

By Dr. SAMUEL CLARKE,

Of St. James's.

On Lent.

MATTHEW, iv. 1.

Then was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness, to be tempted of the devil.

THE history of our Saviour's temptation, is a portion of scripture in which there are several difficulties that deserve particular explication; and upon which may be made several useful observations, to direct us in our own practice.

I. In the first place it may be inquired, why our Saviour, whom the scripture elsewhere declares to have been tempted in all points like as we are, only without sin, is yet by the evangelists recorded, as having been tempted only at this particular time: *Then was Jesus led up to be tempted*. Then; that is, as soon as he had been baptized: so St. Mark explains it, ch. i. 11, 12. At his baptism, *there came a voice from heaven, saying, thou art my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased: and immediately the spirit driveth him into the wilderness*. The reason is, because he then began to enter upon his office, of preaching the doctrine of salvation; that doctrine, by which the works and kingdom of the devil, the power and dominion of sin over mankind, was to be destroyed. Before this, we do not read of his being tempted; because his life being private like that of other men, his temptations were so likewise, sin only always excepted. Neither after this, is there any mention of his being tempted any more; because the tempter being at this time thoroughly vanquished, did not hereafter hope to prevail so much by tempting, as by opposing and persecuting him. The proper time of trial was just after his baptism, at the first entering into his office. And as the tempter might reasonably think this the likeliest season to assault him with success; so the wisdom of God knew, on the contrary, that it

was

was the fittest time for his repulsing and triumphing over the tempter. For this reason the text takes notice, that Jesus was led up of the spirit, that is, not by the evil spirit, but by the good spirit of God, was he led up to his temptation. So St. Luke expressly, ch. iv. 1. *Jesus, being full of the Holy Ghost, returned from Jordan, and was led by the spirit into the wilderness.* And indeed it is observable, that our Saviour, who before his incarnation appeared to Moses and the patriarchs in the form of God, that is, invested with the immediate glory and power of his father; on the contrary, all the time of his residing here upon earth, appeared [*κενωθεis*,] divested of that glory, being made in the likeness of man; and is accordingly represented through the whole gospel, as acting and working under the conduct of the Holy Spirit; and having as our Lord speaks concerning himself (John, iii. 34.), *given the spirit unto him, not by measure.*

II. It may be enquired, why our Saviour continued so long in the solitary retirement of a desert place, and why he fasted through all that space of forty days. As to his retirement in general, and his fasting or humiliation during that retirement; the reason of it seems to have been, that he might prepare himself before-hand by meditation and prayer, for the executing of that great office which he was about to undertake. Thus Moses, the giver of the law. Thus Elijah, the head of the antient prophets. Thus John Baptist, the forerunner of our Lord, before the day of his shewing unto Israel. (Luke, i. 80.) Thus the apostles of our Lord, at the time of their sending for Paul and Barnabas to preach, *fasted and prayed* (Acts, xiii. 3.) And when they first ordained elders in every church, *they prayed with fasting.* (Ch. xiv. 23.) And our Saviour, admonishing his disciples concerning some extraordinary miraculous gifts, with which they were to be indued: *This kind* (saith he) *goeth not out, but by prayer and fasting.* (Matth. xvii. 21.) In ordinary cases, it is to be understood by us as a rule and example in proportion, that in undertaking any office, and especially any sacred function, we be not rash and precipitate, careless and full of worldly thoughts and designs; but that, withdrawing our minds from the world, and attending seriously to the

promoting of God's glory, or the interest of truth and virtue among men, we beg the Divine assistance to enable us, and by meditation and study strengthen our own resolutions of being diligent, and improve our qualifications toward being more successful in the performance of our duty.

As to the particular space of time wherein our Saviour fasted, which was forty days; this was an accomplishment of those antient types, when *Moses was with the Lord in the mount forty days and forty nights, and did neither eat bread, nor drink water* (Exod. xxxiv. 28.); and *Elijah went in the strength of the meat that he had eaten, forty days and forty nights, unto Horeb the mount of God.* (1 Kings, xix. 8.) Moses's fast was for the sins of Israel in the wilderness. *I fell down before the Lord forty days and forty nights, I did neither eat bread, nor drink water, because of all your sins which ye sinned, in doing wickedly in the sight of the Lord, to provoke him to anger.* (Deut. ix. 18.) Elijah's fast was for the idolatry of Israel in the days of the kings. *There came a voice to him saying, What dost thou here, Elijah? And he said, I have been very jealous for the Lord God of Hosts; because the children of Israel have forsaken thy covenant, thrown down thine altars, and slain thy prophets with the sword.* (1 Kings, xix. 13.) These types therefore of the giver of the law, and of the chief of the prophets, our Saviour, who came to fulfil the law and the prophets, to fulfil all legal as well as moral righteousness, and to be an expiation for the sins of the whole world, thought fit to accomplish. And possibly even in his own fast also of forty days, there might still be something typical and prophetic. For, as it was told to Ezekiel in his vision (ch. iv. 6.), *Thou shalt bear the iniquity of the house of Judah forty days, I have appointed thee each day for a year:* and as the prophet Jonah prophesied of Nineveh, *yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown;* which, though in the literal sense it was deferred upon their repentance, yet in the accounts of prophetic computation, it was really fulfilled, as is intimated at the conclusion of the book of Tobit: so it is very observable, that God suffered the manners of the Jews in the wilderness, upon whose account Moses's fast was kept; God bore with them, I say, in the wilderness forty years, in the time of that great provocation.

son. (Acts, xiii. 18. and Ps. xcv. 8.) And from the time of our Saviour's death to the final destruction of Jerusalem, the same impenitent nation had again the same space allowed them of forty years.

The use of such observations as these is, to shew the exact connexion there is between the several prophetic types made use of in scripture, and the events to which those types have relation. The comparing of which, one with another, is a confirmation of the truth of the inspired writings, and consequently of the truth of the revelation itself.

The churches in following ages, long after the apostles times, instituted the forty days fast of Lent, for some sort of a resemblance or imitation of our Saviour's fast; but this, being not of apostolical institution, is to be looked upon only as all other appointments of merely human authority.

III. It may be inquired, why our Saviour, who had power over unclean spirits, and could cast out devils at his pleasure, was yet pleased to submit himself and condescend so far, as to be tempted at all by the enemy. To this question the apostle gives an answer, Heb. ii. 14. that our Lord being through death *to destroy him that had the power of death*, that is, the devil; took therefore upon him, not the nature of angels, wherein he could not have died, but the nature of men. *Wherefore in all things it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people. For in that he himself hath suffered, being tempted, he is able to succour them that are tempted.* And, ch. iv. 15. *we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but one who was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin.* Tempted not only by the great adversary, as in the present history, whereof my text is a part; but tempted also by all the usual difficulties of human life. For so he expresses himself to his disciples, (Luke, xxii. 28.) *Ye are they which have continued with me in my temptations.* And indeed the design of his coming into the world, was not barely to die; but in the whole course of his life also, to set an example of humility and of perfect obedience, as well as to give himself a propitiation for our sins by his death. For this reason he was

circumcised, and became obedient in all things to the law of Moses. And when he came to John's baptism; though he had no sin to wash away by repentance; and John, knowing him, would have forbidden him, saying, *I have need to be baptized of thee, and comest thou to me?* (Matth. iii. 14.) yet Jesus insisted upon it, saying, *Suffer it to be so now; for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness.* All righteousness; that is, every thing which is not only properly and strictly needful in itself; but every thing that is meet, every thing that is decent, every thing that is regular, exemplary, or of good report.

IV. It may be inquired (and this is one of the greatest difficulties of all), why the tempter would at all assault our Lord, or what advantage he could possibly hope to gain over him? Was it possible that he could think to defeat the counsel of God, or disappoint the design of his sending the Messiah into the world? To this it may be replied, 1st, That as wicked men perpetually attempt vain, unreasonable, and absurd things; so wicked spirits likewise, deserted of God, and forsaken of all goodness and true understanding, may well be supposed to attempt things no less unreasonable and absurd. That evil spirits should at any time have hoped to prevail against the Almighty by power and force, as some have supposed, is indeed too absurd to be imagined. But that they should rebel against the counsel and will of God, and endeavour maliciously to overthrow his kingdom and righteousness; this is no more than what wicked men, in a lower degree, are perpetually doing. But 2dly, it may be considered further, that possibly the tempter was not yet sure, whether our Lord was indeed the Messiah or no. His words, *if thou be the Son of God*, seem to express his uncertainty concerning that matter. And there are several other things taken notice of in scripture, the observing of which will make this seem less improbable. The evangelists tell us, that the devil entered into Judas, and put it in his heart to betray his master. By this it appears, that the tempter did not even then know, that the salvation of men was to be accomplished by the shedding of the blood of Christ; seeing he hoped to put an end to the doctrine of Christ, by destroying his life. And this will be the less

less to be wondered at, if we consider what is declared in scripture even concerning good angels themselves, *who always behold the face of our Father which is in heaven.* (1 Pet. i. 11.) The ancient prophets, says the apostle, *saw what, and what manner of time, the spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow. Unto whom it was revealed, that not unto themselves, but unto us they did minister the things which are now reported unto you by them that have preached the gospel unto you, with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven. Which things the angels desire to look into.* Not only evil spirits understood not what the prophets had foretold concerning the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow; but even good angels themselves, St. Peter tells us, were desirous to look into those things. And St. Paul carries this matter still further; *To preach (saith he) the unsearchable riches of Christ; and to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ; to the intent, that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places, might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God.* (Eph. iii. 9.) By the church; that is, by the dispensations of God's Providence toward his universal church, by the events accomplishing ancient types and mysteries; and by the clear fulfilling of obscure prophecies: by these is the wisdom of God, and the manifold beauty of the Divine counsels, made known not to men only, but to angels also. And this perhaps is the true meaning of that obscure text (1 Tim. iii. 16.) *The mystery of godliness, (or God) manifest in the flesh* (this is the old and true reading), was seen of angels: seen, not in the literal sense, for that was no mystery; but understood, apprehended, made plain to the angels; who were before, in that sense, desirous to look into it. To mention but one place more: there is a very remarkable expression in the book of Tobit, ch. vi. 17. where the angel Raphael, one of the seven spirits that are described as going in and out before the throne of God, is introduced thus speaking: *Moreover, I suppose,* says he (he does not speak as with certain knowledge, but, *I suppose,* says he), *that she shall bear the children,*

He who considers these, and the like expressions of scripture, will not perhaps think evil spirits to be creatures of such extensive capacity, but that the tempter might very well be uncertain, whether our Saviour was the promised Messiah or no, at the time of his presuming to tempt him as in the text. But, 3dly, supposing the tempter did know our Lord to be the promised Messiah, at the time of his tempting him; yet still it was by no means impossible for the great deceiver to suppose, that as, by seducing the first Adam, he had excluded mankind out of that paradise which God had planted for them; so by endeavouring to make some impression or other upon the second Adam, he might prevent men from being restored to paradise again; and so a second time defeat the counsel of God. Defeat the counsel of God; that is, not prevent any thing that the Almighty had resolved absolutely to accomplish; for, in that sense, nothing can resist his will, nothing can oppose his power: but the enemy may oppose such counsels or designs of God for the salvation of mankind, as are conditional only, and appointed to depend upon the behaviour of others: such counsels of God, as even men are at liberty by their perverseness and obstinacy to disappoint. As when the Evangelist tells us (St. Luke, i. 30.) that *the pharisees and lawyers rejected the counsel of God against themselves*: that is, against their own interest, against their own both temporal and eternal welfare, they rejected the gracious offers of the Divine mercy. Such counsels of God as these, it is no wonder that he whose works and kingdom our Lord came to destroy, should endeavour to oppose. Nor is it at all impossible, that the design of God in sending the Messiah into the world, might seem to the tempter to be of the same nature; to be conditional likewise. For as all the threatenings of God, even those which in the manner of expression are most peremptory and absolute, yet in reality must always be understood to be conditional, and to include a tacit exception upon the case of repentance and reformation; as is evident in the instance of Jonah's prophecy against Nineveh; and as is declared in general by the prophet Jeremy, ch. xviii. 7. *At what instant I shall speak concerning a nation and concerning a kingdom, to pluck up, and to pull down, and to destroy*

destroy it; if that nation against whom I have pronounced, turn from their evil, I will repent of the evil that I thought to do unto them): as, I say, all the threatenings of God are thus undoubtedly conditional, so likewise all the promises of God to mankind, however peremptory and absolute they may seem in the prophetic expressions of scripture, may yet possibly be supposed to be in reality conditional also. The nation of the Jews at this day, notwithstanding the most express and determinate predictions in the Old Testament, not only concerning the coming of the Messiah, but even concerning the precise time and manner of his coming, in terms the most positive and absolute that can be; yet are universally of opinion, that for the sins of that people, his coming has been put off beyond the time limited by the prophets above seventeen hundred years. Well therefore might the tempter apprehend, by the same manner of reasoning, even after the Messiah had begun to appear in the flesh, that notwithstanding the plain predictions concerning the salvation of mankind by him, yet possibly even in all those promises there might be included such tacit conditions, as that either by tempting Christ himself, or his followers the apostles, or by exciting wicked men to oppose and withstand him and his doctrine, he might at least in some measure prevent the effect of his coming, and hinder (at least in great part) the salvation of men.

Thus have I briefly endeavoured to give some answer to that difficult inquiry, why the tempter would at all assault our Lord; what advantage he could possibly hope to gain over him; and how, and in what degree, he could think it possible to defeat the counsel of God, and to disappoint the design of his sending the Messiah into the world.

V. Fifthly and lastly: Since we read no more in the gospels of Christ's being tempted after this, it may be inquired, in the last place, how and in what sense it is said by St. Luke, at the conclusion of this history of our Lord's temptation, that the tempter departed from him only for a season. (Ch. iv. 13.) The words *for a season*, seem to imply, as if after some interval he returned to tempt him again. Which, since we nowhere read that he attempted any more, in any such way of temptation as is recorded in the

text, it is therefore probable that the evangelist's meaning was this; that the tempter having failed of success in his present method, departed from our Lord for a time, intending hereafter to assault him after another manner; that is to say, finding there was no possibility of making any impression upon him by fraud, he resolved for the future to withstand his doctrine by opposition and force: and because there was no room for his suggestions to take any place upon Christ himself, the only remaining way was, to stir up against him the hatred of profane men; and try, by making others his instruments, to put a stop by their malice to that doctrine which he himself by his own temptations could not prevent from being preached. After a season, therefore, according to the intimation St. Luke gives us, he returned again: and having prevailed upon Judas to betray him, and upon the pharisees to encourage the baseness of the betrayer, and upon Pilate to put him to death upon their false accusation; he might very well think, that by the success of this last attempt, he had made sufficient amends for his failure in the first. By which means, not only wicked men, by whose hands our Lord was crucified and slain (Acts, ii. 23.), but even the great deceiver himself, became an instrument, in the hand of Providence, to bring about, according to the determinate counsel and fore-knowledge of God, the salvation of the world. *O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!* (Rom, xi. 33.) The particulars of this last and great transaction are thus recorded in the gospel: our Saviour, in his last discourse with his disciples, a little before his passion, gives them notice of their great temptation approaching: *The prince of this world, saith he, cometh, and hath nothing in me* (John, xiv. 30.). The first effect of this his coming, is expressed, (John, xiii. 2.) *The devil having now put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, to betray him*: and (Luke, xxii. 3.) *Then entered Satan into Judas, surnamed Iscariot, being of the number of the twelve*. This success of the tempter was upon Judas only: but attempts were made upon the rest of the disciples likewise. *The Lord said, Simon, Simon; behold, Satan has desired to*
K k *have*

have you, that he may sift you as wheat; but I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: (Luke, xxii. 31.) and unto all the disciples, Pray, saith he, that ye enter not into temptation (ver. 40.); and again, Rise, and pray, lest ye enter into temptation. (Ver. 46.) Now at the same time that one of his disciples was thus moved to betray him, and the rest afraid to acknowledge him, and tempted to deny him; the malice and cruelty of his enemies, his enemies both visible and invisible, wicked men and wicked spirits, was stirred up against him to such a degree, that he thus speaks concerning himself: *Now is my soul troubled, and what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour (John, xii. 27.): and concerning his enemies, This is your hour, and the power of darkness. (Luke, xxii. 53.)* The effect was, that he was delivered into the hands of wicked men, to be crucified and slain. And when the enemy of man's salvation, and the enemies of their own salvation, thought they had thus entirely put an end to the doctrine of Christ by his death; the wisdom of God, on the contrary, brought it to pass (which was the mystery hid from the foundation of the world), that by this very means, even through death, he destroyed him that had the power of death, that is, the devil (Heb. ii. 14.); according to that prediction of his own, spoken just before his passion, but not understood till after his resurrection; *Now is the judgment of this world, now shall the prince of this world be cast out (John, xii. 31.); and ch. xvi. 11. Of judgment, because the prince of this world is judged.*

The only observation I shall add further upon this head is, that whereas it is affirmed in this history, that *Satan entered into Judas, and put it in his heart to betray his Master*; it is not to be understood either in Judas's, or in any other wicked man's case, that the devil's tempting them is any manner of excuse or extenuation of their sin. For the devil can but suggest, even as wicked men do one to another. And, being tempted, or having evil suggested to them, is no sin. Sin consists wholly in the consent of the will, approving and putting in practice the evil suggested: over which consent of the will the devil has no power; but it is owing entirely to the wickedness of the man's own heart, chusing to do the evil which it ought to have refused. And

therefore the question is put by St. Peter to Ananias, by way of aggravation and severe reproof of his crime; *why hath Satan filled thine heart? (Acts, v. 3.)* that is, what excuse can you have, for complying with so vile a temptation of the devil, which you ought to have rejected with all abhorrence?

But concerning this, (which is a practical inference from the whole,) I shall have occasion to speak farther in the following discourse.

S E R M O N LXXXVI.

On the same Subject.

MATTHEW, iv. 1.

Then was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness, to be tempted of the devil.

I N discoursing upon the account the scripture gives us of our Saviour's temptation, I proposed, 1st, to consider the several difficulties, which, in that portion of the gospel-history, may seem to want more particular explication: and, 2dly, to deduce from thence such observations as may be useful to direct us in our own practice.

I. In the first place, the difficulties, which, in the history of our Saviour's temptation, seemed most necessary to be explained, I have already considered particularly in a foregoing discourse; and have shown distinctly, 1st, Why our Saviour, whom the scripture elsewhere declares to have been tempted in all points like as we are, only without sin, is yet by the evangelists recorded, as having been tempted only at this particular time. 2dly, Why our Saviour continued so long in the solitary retirement of a desert place, and why he fasted through all that space of forty days. 3dly, Why our Lord, who had power over unclean spirits, and could cast out devils at his pleasure, was yet pleased to submit himself, and condescend so far as to be tempted by the enemy. 4thly, Why the tempter would at all assault our Lord, or what advantage he could possibly hope to gain over him. 5thly and lastly, How and in what sense, since we read no more in the gospels of Christ's being tempted after this, it is yet said by St. Luke, at the conclusion of this history of our Lord's temptation, that the tempter departed from him, only for a season.

These several questions naturally arising

in the mind of any one who carefully reads this portion of the gospel-history, I have endeavoured to give particular and distinct answers to them, in the foregoing discourse. I am now in the

II. Second place, to deduce from this history of our Lord's temptation, such inferences or observations as may be useful to direct us in our own practice. And,

1st, We have from hence an intimation given us, that the devil is always ready to tempt men to sin. As the good spirit of God is always willing to assist those who sincerely desire to be religious, and the angels are with cheerfulness sent forth to minister to those who shall be heirs of salvation; so the scripture every where represents the evil one as delighting and watching to entice men into sin: *Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour.* (1 Pet. v. 8.) Again, (Eph. vi. 11, 12.) *Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.* And ch. ii. 2. *According to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience.* If it be here inquired, for what reason wicked spirits tempt men to sin, and what end they can propose in so doing; the most probable answer is, that they do it for the very same reasons as wicked men tempt and seduce one another: partly, as esteeming it a sort of apology or excuse for themselves, if they can draw others into the like condemnation; and partly as being moved with envy, that others should enjoy that happiness which they themselves have lost; and hating those whose manners and dispositions are contrary to their own. Concerning wicked men, the author of the Book of Wisdom thus describes the temper I am speaking of (ch. ii. 12.): *Let us lie in wait for the righteous; because he is not for our turn, and he is clean and contrary to our doings;—he is grievous unto us, even to behold; for his life is not like other men's, his ways are of another fashion.* And concerning evil spirits (ver. 24.), *Through envy of the devil came death into the world; and they that hold of his side,*

do find it. Nevertheless, though the scriptures do indeed thus teach us that the devil is always ready to tempt men to sin, yet it is always carefully to be observed, that he can do nothing more but tempt us. He has no power over our persons, our wills. He can only set before us baits and allurements; but we cannot be hurt by them except we yield to them and chuse them. The treachery and corruptness of our own hearts within, is much more dangerous than all the assaults of the enemy from without. *Let no man say, when he is tempted, I am tempted of God* (Jam. i. 13.); that is, let no man plead, as an excuse for his sin, that God permitted the devil to tempt him into it. (For that this is the meaning of the phrase, *tempted of God*, appears plainly from 2 Sam. xxiv. 1. compared with 1 Chron. xxi. 1. In one of which places it is said, *the Lord moved David to number Israel and Judah*; and in the other, that *Satan provoked David to number Israel*.) Let no man, says the apostle, plead, as an excuse for his sin, that God permitted the evil one to tempt him into it. For God, as he cannot himself be tempted with evil, so neither tempteth he any man; neither doth he permit the devil to tempt any one farther than by laying before him such allurements as it is in the person's power, and it is his duty, and it is the proper trial and exercise of his virtue, to resist. But every man is then, and then only, tempted; then only, effectually and sinfully, *tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed.* The enemy of men's salvation can do nothing more, but only entice the covetous with hopes of gain, puff up the ambitious with expectation of honour, allure the voluptuous with prospects of pleasure. Where the mind is not under the power of any of these corrupt affections, the tempter finding nothing in it, (as the scripture expression is, John, xiv. 30.) his temptations can take no hold, and his power is at an end. *Resist the devil*, says the apostle, *and he will flee from you.* Take heed only that your own heart be sincere, sincere in the pursuit of truth and virtue; and all the fiery darts of the wicked one will in course be quenched. If we do not, by our own perverseness, grieve and drive from us the good spirit of God; greater is he that is in us, than he that is in the world. (Ecclus.

xv. 17.) God, saith the son of Si-
vach, *has set before man life and death ;*
and whether him liketh, shall be given him.
The good spirit is equally willing, and
more able to help us, than the evil one
can be to hurt us. In vain therefore do
wicked men hope to extenuate their own
crimes, by alleging that they were
tempted by the devil. For the scripture
never mentions it as an excuse, but on the
contrary, as an aggravation of a fault,
when it is of such a nature as may well
be supposed to have been suggested by
the evil one, and for that reason ought
above all things to have been carefully
avoided. *Why has Satan filled thine heart ?*
said St. Peter to Ananias (Acts, v. 3.), by
way of more severe reproof, for his pre-
sumption in attempting to deceive the
Holy Spirit, wherewith God had inspired
the apostles. Nor indeed is it at all im-
possible, but that men's wicked deeds may
sometimes rightly be ascribed to the de-
vil, even when perhaps they proceed only
from the corruption of their own hearts,
and not from any immediate suggestion
of evil spirits. For, as it is agreeable to
the style of scripture, and to the reason
of things, to ascribe every thing that is
good to God ; because he is the original
author of the powers by which all good is
done ; and whatever good is done, is in
obedience to his commands, and agreea-
ble to his nature and will : so every wick-
ed thing that is done, may in a propor-
tionate sense be ascribed to the devil ; be-
cause he is the head, and the beginner and
encourager of evil ; and whatever evil
is done, is in imitation of him, and agree-
able to him.

2dly, The second observation I would
draw from the history of our Lord's
temptation, is, that we are hereby taught,
that no person whatsoever is so great or
good, as to be exempt from temptation.
If the captain of our salvation was him-
self made perfect by suffering, let no man
think himself so good, as not to deserve
chastisement at the hand of God. If
Christ himself was in all points tempted
like as we are, let no man think him-
self so perfect, as to be above the dan-
ger and the fear of temptation. We
have great reason, as the apostle admo-
nishes, *to give earnest heed to the things*
that we have heard, lest at any time we
should let them slip. (Heb. ii. 1.) For
the deceitfulness of sin is great, and the

tempter is always watchful to seduce us,
and the heart of man is apt to grow
negligent. So that even the best Christi-
ans are by St. Paul admonished *to work*
out their salvation with fear and trembling.
Let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed
lest he fall (1 Cor. x. 12.) ; and, *Thou stand-
est by faith ; be not high-minded, but fear.*
(Rom. xi. 20.)

3dly, From the consideration of the
time of our Saviour's being tempted,
which was immediately after his baptism,
we are instructed, that when men first set
about the practice of religion, they are
then reasonably to expect the greatest
difficulties in their duty. *My son, if thou*
come to serve the Lord, prepare thy soul for
temptation. (Ecclus. ii. 1.) The life of
a Christian is in scripture compared to a
state of warfare ; wherein he that goeth
out to battle ought well to consider, be-
fore his setting out, what is the strength
of the enemy that cometh against him.
Whoever will lead a religious life must
begin with expecting to find difficulty in
subduing his own vicious passions, and to
find opposition from the course of a cor-
rupt and debauched world. *No man,* saith
St. Paul, *should be moved by these affections ;*
for yourselves know that we are appointed
thereunto. (1 Thess. iii. 3.) *Ye, and all*
that will live godly in Christ Jesus, shall
suffer persecution. (2 Tim. iii. 12.) For
this reason, the scripture frequently uses
the phrase of overcoming, to express a
Christian's perseverance in the love of
truth and virtue. He must be tempted
with allurements, and terrified with dan-
gers ; and then, if he overcometh, saith
our Saviour, *he shall inherit all things.*
The sooner a man begins the practice of
true religion, the fewer evil habits and
the less strong vicious inclinations will he
have to struggle with from within. And
when he has once got above the allure-
ments of inward temptation, he will with
much greater advantage be able to with-
stand the force of persecution from abroad.
When our Saviour had entirely repulsed
the first assaults of sensual pleasure and
ambition, *the tempter,* says the text, *de-*
parted from him, and angels came and mi-
nistered unto him. Thus, whosoever, in
the practice of religion, steadily resists
the first temptation to vice, and suffers
not himself to be corrupted with any evil
habits, shall, after that, more easily keep
himself, and that wicked one toucheth him
not.

not. Wisdom, that is virtue, is glorious, faith the author of the Book of Wisdom (ch. vi. 12.), and never fadeth away. Whofo seeketh her early, shall have no great trouble, for he shall find her sitting at his doors.

4thly, From the following expression in the text, that Jesus being led by the Spirit (Mat. iv. 1.), or being full of the Holy Ghost (Luke, iv. 1.), went up into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil; we may learn that temptation to sin is not at all an argument of God's displeasure, but only a trial of us appointed by his wise providence. It is, in the nature of things, a necessary and essential condition of a probation-state, that there should be some trial of men's virtue. And, in this sense, the scripture scruples not to affirm, that God himself tempts men. (Gen. xxii. 1.) *After these things God did tempt, that is, did try, Abraham.* And (Deut. viii. 2.) *God led thee these forty years in the wilderness, to prove thee, to know what was in thine heart, whether thou wouldst keep his commandments or no; and suffered false prophets, (ch. xiii. 3) that he might know whether you love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul.* The meaning is; not, that in these cases God does not know before, how men will behave themselves; but that they who have in them a true root of virtue, may actually bring forth the fruit of it; may be exercised, may be approved, may be made manifest, to the world here, and to men and angels hereafter; and may be, in themselves, improved, established, and fitted for the state of heaven. *The trial of our faith* (Jam. i. 3.), *faith the apostle, worketh patience, and patience experience, and experience hope* (Rom. iii. 4.). For this reason, we are exhorted not to faint, nor to be cast down under temptations; nor to think it strange concerning the fiery trials that are to try us. Nay, on the contrary, we are encouraged even to rejoice under manifold temptations (1 Pet. i. 5.), to call the man blessed *that endureth temptation* (Jam. i. 12.); to glory in tribulations (Rom. v. 3.); to count it all joy, when we fall into divers temptations. (Jam. i. 2.) Considering, that *when we are tried, we shall receive the crown of life* (ver. 12.), and that *the trial of our faith is much more precious than of gold that perisheth.* (1 Pet. i. 7.) For, when he has

tried us (as holy Job expresses it), we shall come forth as gold. (Ch. xxiii. 10.) And the author of the Book of Wisdom, (ch. iii. 5.) God, faith he, *proved the souls of the righteous, and found them worthy for himself; as gold in the furnace hath he tried them, and received them as a burnt-offering: and in the time of their visitation, (that is, at the day of judgment,) they shall shine, and run to and fro like sparks among the stubble; they shall judge the nations, and have dominion over the people, and their Lord shall reign for ever.*

Nevertheless, it is here carefully to be observed, that all the things which the scripture speaks in this manner concerning temptations and our rejoicing under them, are to be understood only of temptations either already past and overcome; or else of such as we have very good ground of assurance that, by the grace of God, they shall be overcome. For otherwise, as to temptations in general, temptations unexperienced, and of which we know the danger but not the success; concerning these, the direction the scripture gives us, is, on the contrary, that we may lawfully, nay, that it is our duty to pray against them, and endeavour to avoid them. Our Saviour, who knew what was in man, thus exhorts his disciples, *Watch and pray, lest ye enter into temptation* (Mark, xiv. 48.); and himself prays, not for his own sake, but as an example to us: *Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me.* Our nature is frail, our passions strong, our wills biassed; and our security, generally speaking, consists much more certainly in escaping great temptations, than in conquering them. For this reason, our Lord directed his followers, when they were persecuted in one city, to flee unto another. Which they who refused to do, led themselves into temptation, and tempted God: putting themselves upon an expectation of an extraordinary assistance, where God had not given any promise of affording it. For where God calls us to a trial, he will enable us to go through it; but there is no assurance of such assistance to the presumptuous. It is not lawful, therefore, for men to go of themselves, and throw themselves into temptation; and we are taught to pray, moreover, that God also, in his good providence, would not lead us into it. This phrase, of God's leading men into temptation, it is evident.

dent, must be understood according to the analogy of scripture language; which, because nothing can come to pass without God's permission, does therefore usually, in acknowledgment of the supreme superintendency of Divine Providence over all events, ascribe every thing figuratively to God. As when God is said to have delivered a man, who is slain by chance, into the hand of his neighbour; to have moved David, by means of Satan's temptations, to number Israel and Judah; to have hardened Pharaoh's heart; to have blinded the eyes, and made fat, or stupid, the heart of the people; to have sent forth a lying spirit among Ahab's prophets; to have hardened the spirit of Sihon king of Heshbon, and made his heart obstinate; to have hardened the nations to come against Israel to battle, that he might destroy them utterly; to have put it in the hearts of evil princes, to give their kingdom unto the beast or false prophet; to send upon men a strong delusion; and, in the phrase we are now speaking of, to lead men into temptation: it is plain, in all these expressions, the intention is not to affirm (except perhaps in some judicial cases) that God, actually and efficiently, does these things; but only, that in the course of his all-wise providence, he justly permits them to come to pass. Wherefore, when our Saviour teaches us to pray that God would not lead us into temptation; the meaning is, that he would be pleased so to order and direct things by his all-wise providence in this probation-state, as not to suffer us to be tempted above what we are able, but that he would with the temptation also make a way to escape, that we may be able to bear it. And particularly, that he would not judicially, and in anger, give us up and leave us to the power of temptation, and to the seducements of the evil one; as he did Pharaoh and Ahab, and Judas, and the Israelites in the wilderness, when (as the Psalmist expresses it) *he gave them up unto their own hearts lusts, and let them follow their own imaginations*. But that on the contrary, he would either, by his preventing mercy, keep us from *the hour of temptation* (Rev. iii. 10.), or, by his gracious support, *deliver us out of it*. (2 Pet. ii. 9.)

5thly, From what St. Luke records, at

the conclusion of this history of our Lord's temptation, that the tempter departed from him *only for a season*; we may observe, that though at the first entrance into the course of a religious life, the greatest difficulties and temptations are generally to be expected; and when once those are clearly overcome, the ways of virtue usually become pleasantness, and her paths peace; yet men ought never to look upon themselves as secure from the returns of temptation; but that the evil one may again assault them under different forms and shapes, to seduce them into different kinds of sins; grounding temptations, perhaps, even upon their security itself. Wherefore *we ought*, says the apostle, *to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip*. (Heb. ii. 1.) For many wise and good resolutions, made with great sincerity and right intention, have, through negligence after some time, and want of serious recollection, failed of their effect. *Watch ye, therefore, and be ready always; for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come: Blessed* (says our Saviour) *is that servant whom his Lord, when he cometh, shall find so doing*. (Matth. xxiv. 46.)

Lastly, From the particulars of our Saviour's temptation, we may observe the several principal ways by which the tempter assaults men, and what are the most proper means of resisting each temptation.

His first temptation was founded upon bodily and temporal wants: when he was an hungred, the tempter said, *if thou be the Son of God command that these stones be made bread*. His meaning was; if you are the beloved of God, do not submit to undergo any hardships; but insist with God, that he shew his love to you, by supporting you even miraculously. Want is the great temptation to murmuring against God; and therefore Satan is represented (Job, i. 11.) as thus pleading with God against Job: *Put forth thine hand now, and touch all that he hath, and he will curse thee to thy face*. And the prayer of Agur is for this reason given us as an example: *Give me not poverty, lest I take the name of my God in vain*. (Prov. xxx. 8.) The proper preservative against this temptation, our Saviour teaches us in his reply: *Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth*

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out of the mouth of God. We must at all times depend upon the protection of Providence; and consider, that as in the time of plenty, we are supported not by the things themselves which we enjoy, but by the blessing of God which alone enables them to support us; so, in the time of want, the same Providence, if he thinks fit, and sees that it will promote our eternal interests, can still always find proper means of preserving us.

The second temptation offered to our Lord was, *If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down*; down from a pinnacle of the temple; *for it is written, he shall give his angels charge concerning thee, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone*. To this temptation our Lord replies, that there being a commandment given in the law, *Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God*; it is therefore not lawful for any man to throw himself needlessly into danger, merely to try whether Providence will therein protect him or no. We may rely upon God, that he will give his angels charge over us, in all dangers into which his providence leads us; but no man ought to tempt God, by running wilfully any presumptuous hazards.

The use therefore of this part of the history of our Lord's temptation, may be to warn us against two or three very dangerous seducements of this kind. One is, a presumptuous confidence or vain security, relying upon groundless notions of predestination, and of God's particular favour to us; or founded upon a false application of conditional promises, as if they were absolute: *Cast thyself down, for it is written, he shall give his angels charge concerning thee*.

Another dangerous temptation which we are here likewise warned of; a temptation, contrary at first sight to that now mentioned, and yet in reality leading into the same snare; is, distrust of God, such a distrust as the Israelites in the wilderness were guilty of, when they said, *he smote the stony rock that the waters gushed out; but can he give bread also, can he provide flesh for his people?* (Ps. lxxviii. 20.) He hath preserved thee indeed in other dangers; but cast thyself down from hence, and, if he has a favour to thee, will he preserve thee then? When God has given men sufficient evidence of any truth, to be still dissatisfied, and continually requiring other signs, is tempting of God. Thus the Jews in the wilder-

ness (Ps. xcv. 9.), though they saw God's works with their own eyes, yet continued to tempt him *ten times*. (Numb. xiv. 22.) Thus the pharisees, after the voice from heaven at our Saviour's baptism, and after many other miraculous works, yet still desired of him a *sign from heaven*. (Matth. xvi. 1.) Thus, after the proof given to St. Peter, of God's receiving the gentiles into the gospel-covenant, he calls it *tempting of God* (Acts, xv. 10.), to endeavour to put upon the necks of the disciples the yoke of the ceremonial law. Thus, after the proofs God has given of his existence, by the works of nature; and of his will, by the revelation of the gospel; to call for more proofs, is a tempting of God.

The third and last temptation offered to our Lord, was worldly power, glory, and interest: *All these kingdoms will I give thee, and the glory of them, if thou wilt fall down and worship me*. The greatest of all temptations, is riches, honour, and power. These are the great incentives to luxury, pride, and tyranny. The prosperity of fools destroys them. (Prov. i. 32.) And, *man being in honour, saith the Psalmist, has no understanding* (Ps. xlix. 20.); that is, is very apt to forget himself, and his duty. *They that will be rich, fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition*. (1 Tim. vi. 9.) Inasmuch that our Saviour declares, *that a rich man shall hardly enter into the kingdom of heaven* (Matth. xix. 23.): hardly, that is, not that riches themselves are any fault, but because of the numerous temptations they accidentally lead men into, in a vicious and corrupt world.

The answer our Lord makes the tempter upon this last trial; *Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve*; teaches us, that we must prefer, before all things, the service of God, and the practice of true religion; being always ready to reject whatever shall come in competition with our duty; even the whole world, if offered to us as the purchase of sin. If we be found of this disposition, lovers of truth, and doers of righteousness, the tempter will depart from us, as he did from our Lord; and angels will come, and minister unto us; and the spirit of God will preserve and guide us unto eternal life.

SERMON LXXXVII.

On Good Friday.

HEB. xii. part of the second verse.

Who, for the joy that was set before him, endured the cross, despising the shame.

IN order to apprehend rightly the meaning of these words, it will be requisite to inquire and consider what we are to understand by the joy here spoken of; what the powerful motive was, which prompted our Lord to undertake the arduous work of our redemption, and which supported and animated him in the accomplishment of it. Whatever it was, doubtless it must have been a motive of vast force, which could lead him through a course of the direst and most dreadful sufferings, and make him *endure the cross, despising the shame*. And to this most painful and ignominious death, we may add the various hardships and distresses of his life; the humble condition he chose, the mortifications he submitted to, and all the insults and indignities he bore, patiently and cheerfully, during his whole ministry.—Led, I suppose, partly by the context, and partly by some other passages in the New Testament, the generality of interpreters have taken it for granted, that the motive mentioned in my text, was our Saviour's personal advancement, even the subsequent honours and powers conferred on him, and his exaltation at the right hand of God. Nevertheless, if we carefully attend to the great end of our redemption, and to the divine character of our Redeemer, we shall find unanswerable objections to this interpretation. We know assuredly, that Christ came into the world, not for his own sake, but for ours; not with a view to his own advancement, but to promote God's glory, and the salvation of mankind. And though, in consequence of his high merit and dignity, he was actually raised to the forementioned honours; yet it does by no means follow, that he was thereby principally influenced and excited to do and suffer what he did. And indeed such a conclusion is very unsuitable to the sublime character of our Redeemer; the purity and perfection of which will not suffer us to entertain any doubt of his acting from the noblest motives, and on the most generous and dis-

interested principle, as will further be shewn afterwards.—Rejecting therefore this construction, as injurious to his honour, and derogating from the perfection of his conduct, let us proceed to inquire what that joy really was which my text speaks of; and which is there represented as our Saviour's grand motive, and indeed his principal support and consolation; which lightened the burden of his sufferings, and enabled him to undergo them with greater alacrity.

As to which it may, I think, be safely concluded, that the joy here spoken of arose, not from a private, but a public cause; even from a prospect of that mighty good which our Saviour was procuring for a whole race of rational creatures; of that inestimable benefit which was to redound to all mankind. that is, to all workers of righteousness, and all true and sincere penitents, over the face of the whole earth. For let us not weakly imagine, that the blessings of redemption were partially dispensed, and even confined and appropriated to actual believers. It is evident, both from reason and scripture, that they were universally to extend to all proper objects; that is, to all true penitents, whensoever existing, and wheresoever dispersed, through the whole world. For in every age, and in every nation, they who feared God, and wrought righteousness, were sure to be accepted, through the merits of Christ, on practicable terms; I mean, on such conditions as Providence should put in their power: which actual faith in Christ was not, we know, to a great majority in all ages.—But to return, the benefits of Christ's redemption being thus universal, it is not to be doubted, but the view of so great and extensive a good must affect him in an extraordinary manner, and produce in such a mind as his the highest satisfaction and complacency. How divine a pleasure must it give him to obtain impunity, and peace, and pardon, for all penitent sinners! To save a sinking world, to reduce a lost race, to relieve a perishing species; to rescue them from the doom of death and destruction, bring them back into the way of truth and life, and even purchase for them an everlasting inheritance! Such were the great and god-like ends which he proposed to effect, and which he pursued from first to last by the fittest and most efficacious means; by

by his heavenly doctrines, and most pure precepts, by his perfect example, and his transcendent merits. Of this blessed work he knew and foresaw the speedy accomplishment; and the prospect thereof could not fail to afford him, not only the truest comfort, but the most inconceivable delight.

To support and strengthen the foregoing explication, let us consider somewhat further, and more distinctly, how eminently and peculiarly suitable such a motive was to the state and character, and the divine disposition of our Redeemer. Whatever external glories were deserved by him, and accordingly conferred on him, good reason we have to suppose, and be assured, that he had far nobler aims, and more generous views, than his own personal grandeur and exaltation, as was before observed. Private views and interested motives may be, and are, on several accounts, very requisite, and very proper for frail and degenerate men; and more especially so under severe trials and temptations. Nor is the merit and virtue of their good actions lost, however it may be lessened by aiming at their own future advantage and felicity. This is evident from fact, and the whole tenor of the gospel dispensation; which sets before us this motive in the strongest light, and demands our continual attention to it. We find it every where applying to our hopes and fears; inviting and encouraging us to virtue and obedience by the promise of a glorious reward, and deterring us from sin and wickedness by severe and solemn threats, and all the terrors of divine vengeance. And this was highly requisite, or rather absolutely necessary. It appeared too evidently from sad experience, that other motives were generally ineffectual, and for the most part indeed quite overlooked. The bulk of mankind were not to be moved, not to be touched by the reasonableness of doing their duty; by the beauty of virtue, and the amiable nature of worthy actions. But they might, and many of them would, be excited by considerations of interest, by the springs of hope and fear, and the powerful principles of happiness and misery. And even on these principles to become obedient and embrace their duty, is truly laudable and virtuous; though, it must be confessed, in a lower degree. To resist the solicitations of sin and sense, to re-

strain fierce appetites, and mortify corrupt affections, from a regard to future safety and welfare, to distant enjoyments, and invisible advantages, and those of a pure and more spiritual nature, is a conduct really meritorious. This is evident in itself, and still more so on the foregoing account: for certainly the divine dispensation of the gospel could never contain, never offer to mankind, such motives as would undermine virtue, and destroy the worth of moral actions and religious duties. It is not therefore to be doubted but Christianity may be, and indeed ought to be, a beneficial, as well as a reasonable service; and the discharge of our duty will be acceptable to God, though we do it on the principle of self-security, and natural good.—But though such a conduct be allowed, either truly moral, or truly religious; yet it is neither the one, nor the other, in perfection. A perfectly good action is chosen and done on its own account, and without any regard to the interest of the agents: and the ground or principle of it is merely a love of truth and rectitude. As this is the noblest and purest motive in the world, so it is most divine. For God himself is influenced entirely by it in all his actions. This we conclude with greater assurance, because he is utterly incapable of receiving, and therefore of proposing, any advantage to himself. For what interest, what benefit, what addition of good, can possibly accrue to him, whose fruitions are full, and his felicity absolutely perfect? Certain therefore it is, that he is, and must needs be, wholly disinterested in all his good and gracious dispensations to his creatures. On them he is pouring benefits continually, and immensely, without any prospect of return, or any possibility of advantage to himself.

This then is goodness divine, and in its greatest and highest perfection; and thus pure it perpetually flows from him, who is the great source and fountain of both. Since therefore such is the nature of God's goodness, can we doubt of its being imitated and copied out by the Son of God, *the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person*? Would not he be willing and desirous, in conformity to his Father's example, to do good for goodness sake? And must not this pure and sublime motive have influenced him more than any private prospects, or personal

personal considerations? He requires even his frail disciples to be *perfect, as their heavenly Father is perfect*: that is, for it can mean no more, to imitate and resemble him to the utmost of their power. And most sure we are, he would never give them a precept not fully observed and perfectly practised by himself; for in every instance he acted as he taught, and exemplified his own rules. His goodness therefore to mankind, and all the inestimable services which he did them, must, without question, have been unmercenary and disinterested; nor can we suppose otherwise without depreciating his merits, diminishing the perfection of his character, and derogating from the glory of his conduct.

Let it be further considered and inquired, whether such a motive was not peculiarly agreeable to that generous zeal, that boundless benevolence, which appeared in all our Saviour's actions and proceedings. How active, how extensive, how unwearied, were his endeavours for the service and salvation of mankind! *Glory to God, and good-will towards men*, were his darling principles, which possessed his heart, and engrossed his affections; on which all his thoughts were fixed, and all his cares centered. The pursuit of them was not only his joy and pleasure, but his very support and sustenance. How indefatigably did he seek and search for all opportunities of doing good! converting the most ordinary incidents and occurrences of life into occasions of bounty and benefaction. The numberless miracles which he wrought, though primarily intended as proofs of his mission, were, at the same time, pledges of his good-will, and demonstrations of his love. His ardent zeal for the salvation of men's souls was accompanied with a kind care and a tender concern for the safety and welfare of their bodies. He gave ears to the deaf, eyes to the blind, feet to the lame, health to the sick, and even life to the dead. His favours and blessings descended promiscuously, like rain from heaven, *on the just and on the unjust*, on the grateful and the ungrateful. The *contradiction of sinners*, and the clamours and calumnies of malicious men, produced no other sentiments in him, than those of grief and pity. Base and impious as they were, they could never be more ready to do

evil, than he always was to do good; and their greatest injuries and indignities met with no other return than his prayers and benedictions. The worst treatment they could give him was never capable of alienating his affection, or obstructing his kindness; and his greatest grief was, that he could not thereby melt them into repentance. But, alas! instead of being mollified by such invincible goodness, they became the more exasperated; and the more he strove to soften their hearts, the harder they grew. The result of which was, that, in spite of all his good offices, and miraculous services, they persecuted him even unto death: a death preceded and attended by every possible circumstance of shame and grief. That heavenly Benefactor, who came into the world on purpose to redeem and rescue it from ruin, must die, it seems, to accomplish it; must die too a most painful and ignominious death, and by their hands whom he came to save! For that life and liberty, that pardon and peace, which he came to procure them, behold! he receives in return, bonds, buffetings, and stripes, the sentence of a malefactor, and the sufferings and death of a slave. All this, and infinitely more than has been said, or can be said, our Saviour endured, and even despised, for our sakes. And the principle on which he acted was pure pity, free benevolence, and disinterested goodness. This, if I mistake not, is the doctrine of my text, as I have been endeavouring to shew.—The proper uses to be made of this doctrine, though plain and obvious, are too important to be quite omitted.

First, then, Since the deliverance and salvation of mankind was the great end proposed by our Saviour, and the joy thence arising, his chief motive for the accomplishment of it; since he was so firmly attached to our interest, and so intensely zealous for our welfare, that no difficulties or dangers could deter him from the pursuit of it; since, moreover, the foresight of our happiness was so pleasing to him, as to lighten his heavy burden, and make him cheerfully endure the bitterest indignities, and sharpest sorrows; what obligations do we lie under for such amazing goodness, and with what sentiments of gratitude ought our hearts to be filled! Is it not manifest, that he made our advantage his own, and sacrificed him-
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self to set us free? Was not his whole life a scene of adversity and suffering, and his death terrible beyond all conception? Under these pressures, his comfort, his joy, was, that he was going to redeem a lost world; to exalt a race of wretched creatures, slaves to sin and corruption, *to the glorious liberty of the sons of God.* In the midst of his grief and anguish, when he was exceeding sorrowful, and sick unto death, this was his cordial. How shall we ever think or speak with due praise, or sufficient thankfulness, of such a benefactor! Most certain it is, that we ought to do both much and often, and with all our might. Less than this will be great injustice, and grievous ingratitude. Such unspeakable grace and goodness, so ill deserved, and so impossible to be requited, ought to affect us in a peculiar manner, and make deep and durable impressions on our hearts. We are bound to commemorate such a friend, to celebrate such friendship, to acknowledge such mercies and favours, in all the proper ways we can think of; and more especially in that way which was appointed by himself: appointed to prevent our minds from sliding into insensibility and forgetfulness; to keep alive and cultivate our gratitude to our Redeemer, and our benevolence and charity to our fellow-creatures. Such an ordinance may be abused (and what is it that men do not abuse?) by irreverence on one hand, and superstition on the other; but in itself it stands clear of all just exception; is perfectly rational, and peculiarly useful, in promoting the ends above-mentioned. But,

Secondly: Since our safety and felicity were so dear in the sight of our Redeemer, that he was willing to purchase them at any rate, and submitted to all sorts of hardships and distresses on that very account; surely it behoves us to take special heed, that we do not, as far as in us lies, frustrate his kindness, and disappoint his love. He came not into the world to redeem obstinate and impenitent sinners; that was impossible, whatever he had done, or whatever he had suffered. To persist therefore in sinful courses, and wicked habits, is not only treachery against ourselves, and our own interest; but it is perfidiousness and ingratitude towards our Deliverer. By continuing in this wretched way, and repeating our

sin and transgressions, we *crucify the Son of God afresh*, as the apostle expresses it, and *put him to open shame.* We not only lessen his triumphs, and diminish his joy, but turn it into grief. Whatever he has done, and whatever he has endured, is all lost on hardened sinners; in respect of whom he both lived and died in vain. On the other hand, the conversion and reformation of every sinner extends our Redeemer's conquest, and is a real addition to his joy. By how much the number of penitent converts is encreased, to so much better and nobler purpose did he suffer; and in the same proportion must his satisfaction be augmented. On these accounts, besides the extreme folly and impiety of an impenitent course, there is, we see, a peculiar baseness and malignity therein, which greatly aggravates the guilt of incorrigible sinners, and must proportionably encrease their condemnation.

Thirdly, and lastly: Since our blessed Saviour lived and died in our behalf, and accomplished our redemption in so free and disinterested a manner; since, moreover, he is our great pattern, and *left us an example that we should follow his steps*; it is certainly incumbent on us to imitate him, even in this respect, as far as we are able. We cannot indeed pretend to be wholly governed by his divine motive, his generous principle; but ordinarily it must operate in some measure, and produce a good effect on our minds, if we will give it leave: for good and virtuous actions are amiable in their own nature, and as such would not fail to recommend themselves; and, it is to be hoped, often do so, where no considerable temptation draws against them. Where duty alone cannot prevail, by all means let us hearken to interest; and well it is for us, that the cause of virtue is seconded and supported by so powerful an advocate. But yet it may deserve to be considered, whether over-looking our interest be not sometimes the most effectual way to promote it. All our hopes depend on God's favour and approbation; and the more we strive to imitate him, doubtless the fairer is our prospect. As then nothing is more opposite to his nature, nothing more odious in his sight, than a selfish and sordid disposition; so nothing is, or can be, more acceptable to him, than an open heart, a public spirit, and a bene-

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ficent conduct. And, moreover, it brings a peculiar reward along with it, and yields the purest and noblest enjoyments. In short, true benevolence and charity is happiness in hand, and heaven in rever- sion. And the more disinterested it is, the more favour and bliss it procures; im- proving, advancing, and perfecting men's minds here, and entitling them more abundantly to a blessed and glorious in- heritance hereafter.

SERMON LXXXVIII.

By ARCHBISHOP SECKER.

On Easter Sunday.

ROMANS, xiv. 9.

For to this end Christ both died and rose and re- vived, that he might be Lord both of the dead and living.

THE public offices of our church have led us, within a few months, through most of the principal transactions of our blessed Redeemer's life on earth. We have commemorated his condescension to take upon him *the likeness of sinful flesh* (Rom. viii. 3.), his submitting to *fulfil the righteousness* (Mat. iii. 15.) of the Jewish law, and his early manifestation to the gentile world; his fasting forty days and nights, and yielding afterward to be *tempted in all points as we are, yet without sin*. (Heb. iv. 15.) Many of his wonder- ful works, many of his gracious instruc- tions, have been rehearsed in our ears; and very lately his most bitter sufferings and death represented, as it were, before our eyes. We have accompanied him, from his sorrows and agonies in the gar- den, through all the sad variety of dis- grace and pain that he underwent, till he *bowed his head and gave up the ghost* on the cross. (John, xix. 30.) We have seen his dead body pierced to the heart with a spear, taken down and interred, the sepulchre closed, sealed up, and guarded; his disciples, though continuing to honour him, quite in despair about him; and yet we find him this day risen again, to die no more.

Surely it is time we should ask ourselves, what was the meaning of so unparalleled a transaction, to which the attention of all mankind hath been called so solemnly ever since? It could not be merely to move our compassion with a piteous history, that

God sent his Son from heaven, to live in wretchedness and die in torment; nor to fill us with a vain admiration, that he raised him from the grave, and hath placed him at his own right hand. What then was the view and use of this most ex- traordinary dispensation? The text in- forms us. To this end *Christ both died and rose and revived*; or, as it should be translated, and is elsewhere in the New Testament, *lives again, that he might be Lord both of the dead and of the living*. Every thing he did or suffered was ordained to accomplish that merciful and awful scheme of Providence, our Saviour's uni- versal dominion over all; to make the obedient good and happy, and reward the disobedient according to their works. This important doctrine I shall

I. Explain and prove. Then shew,

II. Under what obligations it lays us.

I. Christ indeed, as the eternal Son of the Father, and original glory and domi- nion before the world existed, *was in the beginning with God, and was God*. (John, i. 1.) But the apostle speaks not here of that dignity and power which his divine nature always possessed, but which his hu- man nature acquired, by dying and rising and living again. It is true, the former part of his life contributed greatly, both by his doctrine and example, to set up that kingdom and righteousness, over which he was to reign. And even then *the Fa- ther had given all things into his hand* (John, iii. 35.), and *committed all judgment to him*. (John, v. 22.) But this being done in consideration of his future sufferings, on them the foundation of his authority is laid in scripture. Thus St. Paul teaches, that, because *being in the form of God, he was willing to take upon him the form of a servant, an inferior and ministering na- ture, as ours is; and then, being found in fashion as a man, humbled himself yet lower unto the death of the cross; therefore God hath highly exalted him, and given him a name above every name*. (Phil. ii. 6-9.) But elsewhere he more determinately grounds his sovereignty on his passion alone: *We see Jesus, for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour*. (Heb. ii. 9.) And justly doth it entitle him to an authority over us, since it gained him a property in us. For sin both subjecting men by its guilt, as debtors and criminals, to the just sentence of God, and by its do- minion, as captives and slaves, to the un- just

just empire of the devil; our Saviour, by delivering us in each of these respects, hath obtained a double right to us. By giving his life a ransom to divine justice, he hath bought us to himself with the price of his blood; so that we are his in right of purchase. And having destroyed the tyranny of the wicked one over us, by the holiness of the precepts which his death confirmed, and the efficacy of the grace which it procured, we are his again in right of conquest.

This authority, thus acquired, his resurrection openly proclaimed; attesting not only in general the truth of his mission, but in particular the acceptance of his sufferings for our redemption; and consequently his title to govern us, and his power to raise us up again according to his promise, as he had raised himself. Hence, during the remainder of his continuance on earth, he founded and gave laws to his church; and being yet more solemnly invested with fulness of power on his ascension to heaven, he ever lives to rule and protect it. Nor doth his sovereignty extend over mankind alone, but the whole creation. For God, as St. Paul assures us, *having raised him from the dead, hath set him at his own right hand, far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come, and hath put all things under his feet* (Eph. i. 20, 21, 22.): *that in the name of Jesus, as he adds in another place, every knee shall bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; and every tongue confess, that Jesus Christ is Lord.* (Phil. ii. 10, 11.) In these words he is described both as the high priest and the king of the universe. His possession of the former office is expressed by saying, *that every knee shall bow in his name*; for so it should be translated, not *at his name*, when his name is mentioned; though that be a practice, both unexceptionable and reverent. *To bow the knee is to pray.* So, Eph. iii. 14. *For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, that he would grant you to be strengthened by his spirit in the inner man.* Therefore to bow the knee in the name of Jesus, is to pray in his name, as the person qualified and appointed to present our petitions to God, and derive his blessings upon us. The remaining part of the passage declares his kingly office:

And every tongue confess, that Jesus Christ is Lord; or, as St. John more emphatically styles him, *Lord of lords, and King of kings.* (Rev. xvii. 14.) Nor are men only, but *all the angels of God required to worship him as such.* (Heb. i. 6.) Created beings, of how exalted rank soever, can only be faithful as servants in the house of God, but Christ as a Son over his house, which himself hath builded. (Heb. iii. 5, 6.)

In what manner he governs the rest of his works we are not concerned to inquire. Men he governs, by giving laws, which every one, who receives the knowledge of them, is bound to obey, and no one may add to, diminish, or alter; by forming those, who submit to him willingly, into a regular society, or universal church, provided with fit means of instruction, discipline, and grace; by improving them in all goodness, and strengthening them against all temptation, by providing, that in the worst of times *the gates of hell shall not prevail* (Mat. xvi. 18.) to abolish true religion; and gradually bringing on, according to his promise, that happy age, when *the kingdoms of this world shall become the kingdoms of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall take to himself his great power, and shall reign.* (Rev. xi. 15, 16.) But however illustrious his dominion may then appear, the full manifestation of it, for which every other act of his regal authority is opening the way, will be in that hour, when he shall come with the holy angels to sit upon the throne of his glory, and all nations being gathered before him (Matt. xvi. 27.—xix. 28.—xxv. 31, 32.), shall sentence the wicked, both men and devils, to everlasting punishment, but bestow on the righteous life eternal. After which, the ends of this whole dispensation being now accomplished, *he shall deliver up his kingdom of grace to God even the Father* (1 Cor. xv. 24.), in whose kingdom of glory he shall still reign, with him and the Holy Spirit, over his saints and angels, *for ever and ever.* (Rev. xi. 15.)

Such is the sovereignty over all, which the Son of Man first died to acquire; and then rising again, lives to exercise. And as it extends through the whole creation of God, from the beginning to the consummation of all things, no wonder if the reasons and circumstances of many particulars in it be incomprehensible to us. Notwithstanding these, as the main of it appears highly worthy

worthy of God, and no part evidently unworthy, we ought to believe the whole, on the strong and manifold attestations which he hath given us of its truth. The *preaching of Christ crucified* may seem *foolishness* (1 Cor. i. 23.) to the wise in their own imaginations: but whoever is duly sensible of his being in a state where we *know but in part, and see what is nearest to us through a glass darkly* (1 Cor. xiii. 12.), will be glad to receive, with implicit faith, that *wisdom of God in a mystery, which he hath ordained before the world unto our glory.* (1 Cor. ii. 7.)

The foundation of the Christian scheme, that we are all originally prone to sin, and actually guilty of it, is but too notorious. Now the mercy of our heavenly Father, though constantly shewn in a proper degree to every proper object, preserves not the faulty from daily experiencing dreadful consequences of their faults in this life, which the sincerest repentance will not singly prevent. And who can disprove, what the New Testament affirms, and throughout implies, that we should all have experienced yet worse consequences in the life to come, had not our blessed Redeemer done and suffered for us the things he hath? In general, that one person may, by interposing, and even bearing much, on behalf of others, avert from them great evils, and procure them great good, we are very sensible. And supposing us ever so ignorant what connexion in particular there is between the sufferings of Christ and our own salvation, we have no more cause to complain, than that we cannot learn by what steps a friend hath delivered us from worldly danger, or by what efficacy a medicine hath restored our health. All that we are concerned in, all that we are to believe and do, we are plainly told. And if we are not told what God alone is concerned in, the reasons of his own counsels; we may well be content, that by this method we are brought to eternal felicity, without asking why rather by this than any other.

Yet even to that inquiry some answer may be returned. The poverty and labour, the injuries and provocations, the sorrows and pains, which our Saviour went through, with so perfect and constant a greatness and goodness of mind, afford the strongest confirmations of our faith in his doctrine, and most powerful

incitements to practise the very hardest of his precepts. That we are not forgiven, but on the condition of his undergoing these things, proves, that God hath an irreconcilable abhorrence of sin, and a high regard to the honour of his government: while yet his providing for the performance of this condition proves equally that he hath the tenderest compassion for his fallen and helpless creatures.

Other footsteps of wisdom in this wonderful transaction, an humble search may undoubtedly trace. But whether many more, and yet weightier motives to it, may not still remain behind, which perhaps it is impossible, perhaps unfit, for us to see at present, we cannot know, for we are not told. Who would venture to say of the most familiar object of sense before him, that its only uses are those which he is able to discover? and surely we ought not to have less modesty in points that are so much farther beyond our reach. We believe, on the credit of men like ourselves, many things to have influences that we neither have experienced them to have, nor discern by reason that they must have. Why then is not God to be trusted, as well as our fellow-creatures? and since, in the affairs of this world, we often walk *not by sight but by faith* (2 Cor. v. 7.); what objection can there be against it in those of another? especially considering, that we are only a small portion of the whole, the rest of which is almost entirely hid from us: and cannot even conjecture, what dependences there may be of one part on the other; and much less what those dependences may require.

It plainly appears, that men are by no means the only beings interested in our blessed Lord. The scripture teaches, that, as *by him and for him were created all things that are in heaven and are in earth, visible and invisible, and by him all things consist*: so *by him also was God pleased, having made peace through the blood of his cross, to reconcile all things to himself, whether they be things in earth or things in heaven* (Col. i. 16—20.); *that in the dispensation of the fulness of times, he might gather together in one all things in Christ; both which are in heaven and which are on earth, even in him.* (Eph. i. 10.) Such hints as these, of a scheme of Providence amazingly extensive, were not given

given either to gratify or excite our curiosity ; but to admonish us, that in the religious administration of the universe, there are particulars not designed to be comprehended by us at present, but by some other part of the creation ; things done to the intent (as the apostle elsewhere more explicitly informs us) *that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be made known by the church, the manifold wisdom of God, according to the eternal purpose, which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord.* (Eph. iii. 10, 11.) Well then may it become us to be modest in judging of a plan so much too great for us ; and to reverence, without expecting to search out fully, that *mystery of God, and of the Father, and of Christ*, wherein we are expressly told *are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.* (Col. ii. 2, 3.) I proceed therefore now,

II. To shew under what obligations this dominion of our Saviour lays us. And these are, first, to acknowledge ; secondly, to obey it.

If the original relation we bear to our Creator is to be owned and respected ; the next we stand in, to our Redeemer, is as justly entitled to our regard. That one is taught by nature, the other by revelation only, makes no difference. Being equally real, they are equally grounds of duty : and neglect of either is alike profane. God, the great ruler of the world, may both administer the whole of it in such a form as he thinks fit ; and vary the regulations of each part, as varying circumstances require. There can possibly be no more room to doubt, whether under the general laws of his moral kingdom he may form, from time to time, particular institutions of religion ; than whether, under the general laws of human society, may be formed particular institutions of government. Suppose then a person were to advance, concerning the latter, what some bold writers have done concerning the former ; were to profess an intire submission to the mutual obligations of rational beings at large, but an utter contempt of the peculiar statutes of the community in which he lived ; should declare, that the commands of the civil power were only a republication of the law of nature ; that this being absolutely perfect, nothing could be added to it, nothing prescribed, which was

not obligatory before such prescription ; and that therefore all injunctions and determinations, by national authority, of what common reason had not enjoined and determined, were arbitrary, tyrannical, and unjust ; that public wisdom, being always the same, must always direct the same things ; and therefore different orders could never have force in different ages or provinces : would not these notions be extremely absurd ? and surely they are no less absurd in religion, than in social life. If men may form themselves with good cause into particular civil establishments, God may form them with better cause into particular religious establishments, such as that of Christianity. If our earthly superiors may discern sufficient ground, as the condition and behaviour of their subjects alter, to put all, or any part of them, under new regulations, or grant them new privileges ; much more may *our Father, which is in heaven* (Mat. vii. 11), do so with us. If we are bound often to obey the appointments of human prudence without knowing the motives of those appointments, well may Omniscience claim the most unlimited compliance. And if, lastly, a dutiful attachment to the constitution of our country be part of a worthy character ; and wilful violation of it, disloyalty to the state : surely the heartiest zeal for the ordinances of our better country is a still more essential part ; and deliberate contempt of them, rebellion against God : a dreadful crime always, but singularly heinous and fatal in the present case ; because these ordinances are calculated throughout solely for our good, temporal and ipiritual, present and future ; and nothing else can secure us the same advantages. The gospel, beside comprehending and expressing more clearly the whole of natural religion, superadds, also, such assurance of pardon, such means of grace, and such glorious promises of eternal bliss to body and soul ; that little do they consider their own interest, who would rest their case, if they could, on the mere conjectures of unassisted reason ; which, though sufficient to render the condition of those tolerable, who have no other guide ; yet must be owned, in comparison, to leave sinners much room for fear, and afford but small foundation for lasting hope. Indeed, with these new advantages, Christi-

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anity brings in some new precepts also : but none of them burthensome ; and all of them conducive to our happiness, here and hereafter ; provided we not only acknowledge the dominion we are under, but, which is the second and last point, obey it.

There are few who totally reject religion ; but few also, who receive it thoroughly and effectually. Some trusting to the notional belief and formal practice of merely revealed truths and duties, allow themselves to despise, and occasionally to neglect, moral obligations. This was the great error of the Jews in our Saviour's days ; as in truth it hath been of Christians in general ever since ; and there cannot be a more pernicious one. But of late, especially in this nation, great numbers have fallen into the opposite error. Professing the highest value for morals, they have little or none for piety. Even that which nature dictates, they hardly shew any real concern for ; and as absolute a contempt of the doctrines and appointments of scripture, though it may be all the while they think they believe in scripture, as they could do, if they denied it. Now very seldom will either the practice, or even the notions of morality, in such persons, be near so perfect as they should be. For disregard to God, or to any of his commands, will soon bring on a farther disregard, both of right behaviour toward our fellow-creatures, and right government of ourselves ; till, acknowledging virtue to be his law, we shall acknowledge nothing as virtue but what we like ; leave out all uneasy restraints, put in all agreeable indulgencies ; and so have an excellent rule of life in pretence, perhaps in imagination, but in reality none at all. Or supposing this to be otherwise, yet the duties we owe to him who hath made us by the word of his power, to him who hath redeemed us from guilt and misery by his blood, to him who is ready to purify us by his perpetual influences, must be the principal ties we are under ; and did the conscientious observance of them contribute ever so little, though indeed it contributes more than any thing, to the good order of this world ; still it is indispensably necessary to a purpose of far greater moment, preparing our hearts for the employment and happiness of the world to come. We strangely mistake our case, if we mea-

sure every thing, as we are too apt to do, merely by its influence on the present life. This whole scene of things is a state of education and discipline only : we are forming and training up, by the laws of our Saviour's kingdom here, to such a temper and spirit, as may render us for ever blessed in it hereafter. No wonder, if now, in our condition of infancy, we see not the reason and use of every step taken with us. Being sure we are in kind and good hands, our duty and our wisdom is to give up ourselves intirely to God's disposal. For we know not what we do, when we presume to slight any part of what he hath prescribed ; only this we know, that *offending in one point* is, both in reasonable construction and in probable consequence, being *guilty of all*. (James, ii. 10.)

Religion, though ever in substance the same, hath been proposed to mankind in different shapes, as the reason of things in different ages required. Under whichever of these dispensations we had lived, our business had been, humbly to conform ourselves to it, and carefully to improve ourselves by it, *walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord, blameless*. (Luke, i. 6.) But as we are happily reserved to the fullest and clearest, the most rational and amiable exhibition of faith and duty that the world ever saw or will see ; we are surely bound to embrace it with peculiar joy ; to obey from the heart every injunction of so gracious a master, as our blessed Redeemer ; and, which is the end of all, make such a progress in real inward devotion, benevolence, purity, and humility, as will bear a due proportion to the advantages that we enjoy. For it cannot be, that after those demonstrations of love, and those means of improvement, which God hath given us in his gospel, he should only expect us to be as good as heathens : and yet are we not often worse ? But in vain do we call ourselves Christians, if names and forms be the whole of our Christianity : in vain do we call the holy Jesus Lord, unless by doing such things as he commands, we become such as he was. To this therefore, if we have any sense of gratitude, the love of our Saviour must constrain us : to this, if we have any concern for happiness, the fear of our Judge must compel us. For as the apostle, just before the text, hath most truly observed, *none of us liveth to himself,*
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and no man dieth to himself: for whether we live, we live unto the Lord; or whether we die, we die unto the Lord. (Rom. xiv. 7, 8.) In both states we are absolutely his property, and entirely at his disposal. If we obey him, we shall also reign with him: if we deny him, he will also deny us. (2 Tim. ii. 12.) Let us therefore always bear in mind his own awful words: *I am he, that liveth, and was dead; and behold I am alive for evermore, Amen: and have the keys of death and of hell.* (Rev. i. 18.)

S E R M O N LXXXIX.

By ARCHBISHOP TILLOTSON.

On Easter Monday.

COLOSSIANS, iii. 1, 2.

If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth at the right hand of God. Set your affections on things above; not on things on the earth.

THE apostle in this epistle (as his manner is in all the rest) having laid the doctrine of the gospel for a foundation, and endeavoured to rectify some errors, both in doctrine and practice, which the Christians at Coloss were seduced into, by the guile and arts of false teachers and apostles, as particularly *the worship of angels*, and out of a pretence of humility, addressing themselves to God by their mediation, which is the particular scope and design of this epistle: the apostle, I say, having in the former part of it, endeavoured to set them right in this matter, and to establish their minds in the faith and doctrine of Christ; in the latter part of it exhorts them to a conversation answerable to the doctrine of Christ, to a holy and heavenly life; at the beginning of this third chapter: *If ye then be risen with Christ, seek the things which are above, where Christ sitteth at the right hand of God. Set your affections on things above; not on things on the earth.*

This inference is drawn from what he had said at a good distance before, namely, at the 12th verse of the former chapter, *being buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with him, through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead. Being buried*

with him in baptism. For the full understanding of this expression, we must have recourse to that parallel text (Rom. vi. 3, 4, 5.), which will explain to us the meaning of this phrase: *Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ, were baptized into his death; therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death, that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection.* Where we see, that to be baptized into the death and resurrection of Christ, is to be baptized into the similitude and likeness of them; and the resemblance is this; that as Christ being dead was buried in the grave, and after some stay in it, that is, for three days, he was raised again out of it, by the glorious power of God, to a new and heavenly life, being not long after taken up into heaven to live at the right hand of God; so Christians, when they were baptized, were immersed into the water three times, their bodies being covered all over with it; which is therefore called, *our being buried with him by baptism into death*; and after some short stay under water, were raised or taken up again out of it, as if they had been recovered to a new life; by all which was spiritually signified, our dying to sin, and being raised to a divine and heavenly life, *through the faith of the operation of God*; that is, by that divine and supernatural power, which raised up Christ from the dead. So that Christians from thenceforth were to reckon themselves dead unto sin, but alive unto God, through Jesus Christ, as the apostle speaks, Rom. vi. 11.

Now upon this ground, that we are buried with Christ in baptism, and risen with him to a new and heavenly life, the apostle founds the exhortation in the text: *If ye then be risen with Christ, seek the things which are above, where Christ sitteth at the right hand of God. Set your affections on things above; not on things on the earth.* So that the words are an earnest exhortation to a divine life, and a spiritual and heavenly conversation. In which there are two things to be considered:

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First, the duty we are exhorted to, which is heavenly-mindedness. *Seek the things which are above, and set your affections on things above.*

Secondly, the arguments by which the apostle urgeth and presseth this exhortation: *If ye be risen with Christ, seek the things which are above; and seek the things which are above, where Christ sitteth at the right hand of God.* So that my work will be,

First, to shew the nature of the duty to which we are exhorted. And,

Secondly, the force of the arguments which are used to persuade us to it.

First, for the nature of the duty to which we are exhorted; and it is expressed both affirmatively and negatively.

1. Affirmatively; and the apostle useth two several expressions. *Seek the things which are above; and set your affections on things above.*

2. Negatively; *and not on things on the earth.* And this seems to be added, not only to explain and ascertain the object, and to add vehemence and earnestness to the exhortation; but likewise to set off the excellency of the object, by way of opposition and comparison. *On the things that are above; and not upon those pitiful and inferior things which are upon the earth.* And likewise to shew the inconsistency of these, and the impossibility of seeking and setting our affections upon both in an intense degree. For that would be to have two chief ends, *to love God and mammon; to serve two masters;* which our Saviour hath told us is impossible. But this I shall use afterward, as an argument to enforce the exhortation.

To explain the nature of this duty, I shall consider the act, and the object.

1st, For the act, here are two words used to express it, *ζητεῖτε* and *ὑποτίθετε*, *seek and set your affections;* and in these two words, these four things seem to be comprehended; an act of our understandings about these things; the ardency of our affections; the activity of our endeavours in the pursuit of them; and a clear preference of the things which are above, to the things of the earth, when they come in competition. For these two words do comprehend, not only the power of our understandings, and wills, and affections, and an earnest attention and application

of mind to these things; but the activity of our endeavours about them.

(1.) Here is implied an act of our understandings, that we should mind and think upon these things; that we should often consider them, and meditate upon them; that heaven should be much in our thoughts, and the glory and excellency of that state which we hope to attain to, and by what ways and means we may come to be made partakers of that blessed inheritance.

(2.) It implies likewise an act of our affections; that we heartily love and desire the things that are above, with that ardency and vehemency of affection, which is proportionable to the worth and excellency of them. And both these are included in the word *ὑποτίθετε*, which is sometimes translated *to mind*, sometimes *to set our affections upon a thing.*

(3.) Activity and industry in the prosecution of these things, if by any means we may attain them. And this is implied in the word *ζητεῖτε*, *seek the things which are above.* When we know there are such treasures in heaven, so great a reward laid up for good men, *joys so unspeakable and full of glory,* and when our understandings have dwelt so long upon these things, as to work upon our affections, these, like so many springs of motion, will set our endeavours on work, for the obtaining of what we so much love and desire, and will make us inquisitive, with the young man in the gospel, *what good thing we shall do, that we may inherit eternal life;* by what means we may best secure our title to heaven and happiness; and very industrious to acquire those qualities and dispositions, which will fit us for heaven, and the blessed sight and enjoyment of God; nay, by which we may begin this happy state here, by our conversation in heaven, whilst we are sojourning here below, as *pilgrims and strangers in the earth.*

(4.) It implies a clear preference of the things above, to the things of the earth, when they come in competition. And in this sense the word *ὑποτίθετε* is observed to be used in good authors, for taking part with, and adhering to one side when two parties or interests come in competition. And indeed this phrase and form of speech, when the thing is expressed affirmatively and negatively, is

very often used by way of comparison when two things come in competition: *Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth: but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven. Labour not for the meat that perisheth; but for that which endureth to eternal life.* So here: *Set your affections on things above, not on things on the earth.* When heaven and earth come in competition, the happiness of the next life, and the enjoyments of this, the interest of your souls, and of your bodies, *the things which are not seen, and are eternal, and the things which are seen, and are but temporal;* a holy, and heavenly, and virtuous life, and a sensual and sinful course, *choose the better part,* stick to that which is the true and lasting interest; prefer heaven before earth, and the care of your souls to that of your bodies, things eternal to things temporal, and a holy and virtuous life, which leads to heaven, to those sinful and vicious practices, which will sink men into perdition. For that this also the apostle means by *things on the earth*, sinful lusts and practices, seems very probable, from what follows, at ver. 5. *Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth.*

2dly, Let us consider the object of this act, what it is that we are to seek and set our affections upon; and that is, *the things which are above.*

(1.) The glorious God and Father of all, and his blessed and eternal Son our Lord Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit of God; these are the great objects of our contemplation and adoration. And then the holy angels, and *the spirits of just men made perfect*, who are examples to us, of doing the will of God here on earth, as it is done by them in heaven.

(2.) The blessed state and condition which we aspire after in the next life, with all the joys and glories of it, *such as eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man.*

(3.) The dispositions to be acquired, and the actions and duties to be performed by us, as necessary qualifications and means for the obtaining of this happiness, and bringing us to the possession of it; all these are comprehended in the latitude of the object, *the things which are above.*

And to seek, and mind, and set our affections upon these, is to do those things, which the consideration of each of these

respectively calls for; so to meditate on God, and mind him, as to fear and love, and serve him; to seek his glory as our last end, and the enjoyment of him as our chief good; to seek his favour above all things, and to sue to him, as the fountain of all grace, and *the giver of every good and perfect gift*, and of all blessings temporal, spiritual, and eternal, by the powerful intercession of his Son, the great and only mediator between God and man, to be obtained for us, and to be wrought in us by the powerful virtue and operation of the Holy Spirit. So to mind the angels and blessed saints above, as to aspire after their society, by imitating their virtues, and *being followers of those, who through faith and patience have inherited the promises.* So to meditate on our future blessedness, as to raise our hearts and affections above this world, and effectually to engage us to fit ourselves for that blessed state and condition, that we may be *meet to be made partakers of that glorious inheritance.* And lastly, so to mind all the duties and means necessary and conducing to our salvation, as effectually to perform them; to order our lives, and all the actions of them, with a regard to eternity; in a word, to omit and neglect nothing that may further and promote the great design of our eternal salvation, and to do nothing that may contradict or hinder it. This is *to seek and set your affections upon the things that are above.* And thus I have done with the first thing I propounded, the nature of the duty which we are exhorted to. I proceed to the

Second thing I propounded; which was, to consider the force of the arguments which are used to persuade us to it. Here are three arguments in the text to this purpose: two of them are express, and the third of them implied.

1. *If ye be risen with Christ, seek the things which are above.*

2. *Seek the things which are above, where Christ sitteth at the right hand of God.*

3. The transcendent and incomparable excellency of the things above, in comparison of earthly things. This is intimated in the opposition, *set your affections on the things which are above; and not on things on the earth.* I shall briefly shew the force of each of these arguments.

1. *If ye then be risen with Christ, seek the things which are above.* That is, if ye believe his resurrection, if ye will be conformed to him in it, if ye be made partakers of the power and virtue of it.

(1.) If ye believe the resurrection of Christ. The resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ was the great seal of his ministry, and confirmation of his doctrine; and one great branch of his doctrine was heavenly-mindedness, that we should lay up for ourselves treasures in heaven, because where our treasure is, there will our hearts be also; that we should first seek the kingdom of God, and the righteousness thereof.

(2.) If we will bear a conformity and resemblance to him in his resurrection. He is our great pattern and example, which the gospel propounds to us; and that we may have the nearer conformity to him, the apostle doth not only propose the virtues of his life to our imitation, but where we cannot literally imitate, the apostle urgeth spiritual conformity; that those things which he did and suffered in his body, we should do and suffer spiritually; as Christ died for sin, so we should die to sin; as he literally rose again from the dead, so in conformity to him, we should be spiritually raised to newness of life. As he ascended into heaven, so we should ascend thither also in our hearts and affections. Buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with him, through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead. (Col. ii. 12.) Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death, that like as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection. (Rom. vi. 4, 5.) To be raised from the dead, is in order to a new life. So the apostle tells us, ver. 9, 10, 11. *Knowing that Christ being raised from the dead, dieth no more, death hath no more dominion over him. For in that he died, he died unto sin once; but in that he liveth, he liveth unto God. Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin; but alive unto God, through Jesus Christ our Lord.* As the resurrection of Christ was in order to a better and happier life, to his ascension into heaven, and his living with God: so in conform-

ity to Christ, our spiritual resurrection should be in order to a heavenly and divine life. And what is the meaning of all this? but that men are apt to imitate those whom they love, and do affect to resemble them as much as they can. And therefore to endear our duty to us, the mortification of our lusts, and a holy life, the apostle tells us, that hereby we bear a conformity to Christ, the great object of our love and imitation.

(3.) If ye be made partakers of the power and virtue of his resurrection. The resurrection of Christ is not only a pattern, but hath a power and efficacy in it, to raise us to a spiritual and heavenly life. When Christ rose, he did not rise alone, but many of the bodies of the saints who were dead rose with him, to signify to us the power of his resurrection. It communicated a virtue to those who had an interest in the merits of his death and sufferings, whereby they are enabled to live a new and an heavenly life. *I am the resurrection and the life; he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live.* (John, xi. 25.) And what is the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward, who believe, according to the working of his mighty power, which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead. (Eph. i. 19.) That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death; if by any means I may attain the resurrection from the dead. (Phil. iii. 10, 11.) And you being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he quickened together with him. (Col. ii. 13.) Now this power is derived to us by believing on him, who raised up Jesus from the dead, that he is also able to raise us, who are dead in trespasses and sins, to a divine and heavenly life. The

Second argument is contained in these words, *seek the things which are above, where Christ sitteth at the right hand of God.* Which words do declare to us the exaltation of Christ's human nature, and his being advanced to be the king and governor of his church, having all power and judgment committed to him. Christ's ascension, and his sitting at the right hand of God, is called, *his entering into his glory.* Ought he not to have suffered these things, and then to enter into his glory? (Luke, xxiv. 26.) that is, to be invested with all power and authority for the good of the church.

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But most particularly the apostle describes this, *And set him at his own right hand in heavenly places, far above all principalities, and powers, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but that which is to come; and hath put all things under his feet, and given him to be head over all things to the church.* (Eph. i. 20, 21, 22.)

And now the force of this argument is from the relation that is between the head and the members, between Christ and Christians. The members have an affection for the head, which makes them aspire heavenward; and the head hath an influence upon the members. *If I be lifted up from the earth,* says our Lord, *I will draw all men unto me.* This is spoken of his crucifixion, signifying what death he should die, as the text tells us, John, xii. 32, 33. But it is proportionably true of his ascension, and sitting at the right hand of God; for there is a power and virtue in the resurrection of Christ, and his ascension into heaven, as well as in his death, to draw all men to him. The gift of God's holy spirit is the fruit of his ascension and exaltation *at the right hand of his majesty on high*: and it is by the powerful operation of the spirit of God upon our hearts, that we are raised to newness of life, and our affections fixed upon heavenly things. We are naturally bowed down to the earth, and inclined to the things of this world, "*curvæ in terris animæ, & cœlestium inanes*:" but our glorified Saviour sitting at the right hand of God, by the power of his spirit, draws our affections to him. The

Third and last argument, which is but implied in the text, is the transcendent and incomparable excellency of heavenly things above things on the earth, which the apostle intimates by the opposition, *set your affections on things above; not on things on the earth.* Earthly things are perishing and transitory, gross and unsatisfactory, and cannot be the felicity of an immortal soul, being neither suited to the spiritual nature, nor to the immortal duration of our souls; they can neither satisfy us while we live, nor preserve us from death, nor comfort us in it, nor accompany us into the other world, nor contribute any thing to our happiness there; and if they can do nothing toward our happiness, why should we set our hearts upon them? They that

seek for happiness in earthly things, are like the women sitting over our Saviour's sepulchre with their faces bowed down to the earth; they *seek the living among the dead*; our happiness is not here, it is risen, it is above. Let our hearts ascend thither, where our happiness and our treasure is. Why should we bestow our affections upon those low and mean things, when there are incomparably better objects to fix them upon?

The inference from all this shall be to engage and persuade us by all these arguments and considerations *to seek and mind the things which are above, where Christ sitteth at the right hand of God; and to have our conversation there, where our Saviour is, and from whence also we look for him again: to change these vile bodies, that they may be made like unto his glorious body, according to the working of that mighty power, whereby he is able to subdue all things to himself.* Let all our actions have relation to another world, and our conversation declare, that we are *mindful of another country, that is, a heavenly.* Is Christ our head risen and ascended into heaven? let us in our hearts and affections follow him thither, and patiently wait till he receive our souls, and raise our bodies, and take us wholly to himself, that we may be *for ever with the Lord.*

The resurrection of Christ is a demonstration of a future state after this life, and a pledge of a blessed immortality in another world. For our Lord, by his resurrection from the dead, hath conquered death, and *abolished it, and brought life and immortality to light.* He is *the first fruits of them that slept,* and his resurrection is an earnest and assurance of ours; and from thence the apostle makes this inference, *therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast and unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord; forasmuch as ye know that your labour shall not be in vain in the Lord.* The belief of a future state after this life should put us upon the most earnest and vigorous endeavours to secure this happy condition to ourselves; *if by any means, as the apostle expresseth it, we may attain the resurrection of the dead.* It should raise us above the world and the lusts of it, above all the terrors and temptations of it.

As on the one hand, the serious thoughts of our mortality should check our eager pursuit of this world; so on the other

hand, the belief of a life to come should quicken our endeavours for the obtaining of it; seeing we hope for so happy a state, we should prepare ourselves for it by purity, and holiness of heart and life, by perseverance, and a patient continuance in well-doing. *What manner of persons ought we to be, in all holy conversation and godliness, who have such hopes and expectations? Every man that hath this hope in him, purifieth himself even as he is pure.* Now that life and immortality are brought to light by the gospel, what greater, what other design can any man propose to himself, than to be happy for ever? For such a prize, who would not strive, and run, and take any pains? Who would not deny himself the pleasures of sin, which are but for a season, resist temptations, and conflict with difficulties, and glory in tribulations and sufferings, and be constant and faithful to the death, in hope of that eternal life, which God that cannot lie hath promised?

In our pursuit of the things of this world, we usually prevent enjoyment, by expectation; we anticipate our own happiness, and eat out the heart and sweetness of worldly pleasures, by delightful forethoughts of them; so that when we come to possess them they do not answer the expectation, nor satisfy the desires which were raised about them, and they vanish into nothing: but the things which are above, are so great, so solid, so durable, so glorious, that we cannot raise our thoughts to an equal height with them; we cannot enlarge our desires beyond a possibility of satisfaction. Our hearts are greater than the world; but God is greater than our hearts; and the happiness which he hath laid up for us, is, like himself, incomprehensibly great and glorious. Let the thoughts of this raise us above this world, and inspire us with greater thoughts and designs, than the care and concerns of this present life.

We all profess most firmly to believe, that after a few days we shall leave this world, and all the enjoyments of it, and go to the place from whence we shall not return; that we shall enter upon an unchangeable state of happiness or misery, according as we have demeaned ourselves in this present life; that great care and diligence is necessary to work out our own salvation; that there must be a great pre-

paration of ourselves, by unspotted purity of heart and life, to make ourselves meet for an inheritance with them that are sanctified; that we must labour, and strive, and run, and fight, and give all diligence to make our calling and election sure; that we had need to watch and pray always, that we may be accounted worthy to escape the judgment of the great day, and to stand before the Son of Man. Such thoughts as these should continually possess our souls, and heaven should be always in our eye, if, with St. Stephen, we saw the heavens opened, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God, to see how we behave ourselves here below, and when we have fought a good fight, and finished our course, and kept the faith, to receive us to himself, that where he is, there we may be also.

To whom, with the Father, and the Holy Ghost, be all honour and glory now and for evermore. Amen.

S E R M O N XC.

On Easter Tuesday.

ACTS, xxvi. 8.

Why should it be thought a thing incredible with you, that God should raise the dead?

THE resurrection of the dead is one of the great articles of the Christian faith; and yet so it hath happened, that this great article of our religion hath been made one of the chief objections against it. There is nothing that Christianity hath been more upbraided withal, both by the heathens of old, and by the infidels of later times, than the impossibility of this article. So that it is a matter of great consideration and consequence, to vindicate our religion in this particular. For if the thing be evidently impossible, then it is highly unreasonable to propose it to the belief of mankind.

I know that some, more devout than wise, and who, it is to be hoped, mean better than they understand, make nothing of impossibilities in matters of faith, and would fain persuade us, that the more impossible any thing is, for that very reason it is the fitter to be believed; and that it is an argument of a poor and low faith, to believe only things that are possible; but a generous and heroical faith will swallow contradictions with as much ease as reason assents to the plainest and most evident propositions. Tertullian,

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in the heat of his zeal and eloquence, upon this point of the death and resurrection of Christ, lets fall a very odd passage, and which must have many grains of allowance to make it tolerable: "prorsus credibile est (saith he) quia ineptum est; certum est, quia impossibile: it is therefore very credible, because it is foolish; and certain, because it is impossible:" "and this (says he) is necessarium dedecus fidei," that is, "it is necessary the Christian faith should be thus disgraced, by the belief of impossibilities and contradictions." I suppose he means, that this article of the resurrection was not in itself the less credible, because the heathen philosophers cavilled at it, as a thing impossible and contradictory, and endeavoured to disgrace the Christian religion upon that account. For had he meant otherwise, that the thing was therefore credible, because it was really and in itself foolish and impossible; this had been to recommend the Christian religion, from the absurdity of the things to be believed; which would be a strange commendation of any religion to the sober and reasonable part of mankind.

I know not what some men may find in themselves; but I must freely acknowledge, that I could never yet attain to that bold and hardy degree of faith, as to believe any thing for this reason, because it was impossible: for this would be to believe a thing to be, because I am sure it cannot be. So that I am very far from being of his mind, that wanted not only more difficulties, but even impossibilities in the Christian religion, to exercise his faith upon.

It is true indeed, Abraham, when he was offering up his son Isaac, is said, *against hope to have believed in hope*; but he did not believe against a plain impossibility: for the apostle to the Hebrews expressly tells us, that *he reasoned that God was able to raise him from the dead*. But had he believed this impossible, he could not have reconciled the command of God with his promise; the command to sacrifice Isaac, with the promise which he had made before, that *in his seed (which was Isaac) all the nations of the earth should be blessed*. So that though God was pleased to try his faith with a great difficulty, yet with no impossibility.

I premise all this, to satisfy men how necessary it is to vindicate the Christian religion from this objection of the impossibility of any of its articles. And whatever Tertullian might say in a rhetorical rant, it is very plain that the ancient fathers did not think the resurrection to be a thing impossible; for then they would never have attempted, as they very frequently do, to have answered the objections of the heathens against it, from the pretended impossibility of it.

To be sure St. Paul did not think the resurrection of the dead a thing impossible, for then he would never have asked that question, *why should it be thought a thing incredible with you that God should raise the dead?* Nothing being so likely to be thought incredible and upon so good reason, as that which is impossible.

Leaving therefore to the church of Rome that fool-hardiness of faith, to believe things to be true, which at the same time their reason plainly tells them are impossible, I shall at this time endeavour to assert and vindicate this article of the resurrection, from the pretended impossibility of it. And I hope, by God's assistance, to make the possibility of the thing so plain, as to leave no considerable scruple about it, in any free and unprejudiced mind. And this I shall do from these words of St. Paul, which are part of the defence which he made for himself before Festus and Agrippa; the substance whereof is this, that he had lived a blameless and inoffensive life among the Jews, in whose religion he had been bred up; that he was of the strictest sect of that religion, a Pharisee, which, in opposition to the Sadduces, maintained the resurrection of the dead, and a future state of rewards and punishments in another life; and that for the hope of this he was called in question, and accused by the Jews, ver. 6, 7. *And now I stand here, and am judged, for the hope of the promise made unto the fathers; unto which promise, our twelve tribes, instantly serving God day and night, hope to come; for which hope sake, king Agrippa, I am accused of the Jews*. That is, he was accused for preaching that Jesus was risen from the dead, which is a particular instance of the general doctrine of the resurrection, which was entertained by the greatest part of the Jews, and which to the natural reason of mankind (however the heathen in op-

position to the Christian religion were prejudiced against it) hath nothing in it that is incredible. And for this he appeals to his judges, Festus and Agrippa: *why should it be thought a thing incredible with you, that God should raise the dead?*

Which words being a question without an answer, imply in them these two propositions:

First, That it was thought by some a thing incredible, that the dead should be raised. This is supposed in the question, as the foundation of it: for he who asks why a thing is so, supposeth it to be so.

Secondly, That this apprehension, that it is a thing incredible, that God should raise the dead, is very unreasonable. For the question being left unanswered, implies its own answer, and is to be resolved into this affirmative, that there is no reason why they or any man else should think it a thing incredible that God should raise the dead.

I shall speak to these two propositions, as briefly as I can; and then shew, what influence this doctrine of the resurrection ought to have upon our lives.

First, That it was thought by some a thing incredible, that God should raise the dead. This St. Paul had reason to suppose, having from his own experience found men so averse from the entertaining of this doctrine. When he preached to the philosophers at Athens, and declared to them the resurrection of one Jesus from the dead, they were amazed at this new doctrine, and knew not what he meant by it. *They said, he seemeth to be a setter forth of strange gods, because he preached unto them Jesus and the resurrection.* (Acts, x. vii. 18.) He had discoursed to them of the resurrection of one Jesus from the dead; but this business of the resurrection was a thing so remote from their apprehensions, that they had no manner of conception of it; but understood him quite in another sense, as if he had declared to them two new deities, Jesus and Anastasis; as if he had brought a new god and a new goddess among them, *Jesus and the resurrection.* And when he discoursed to them again more fully of this matter, it is said, ver. 32. that *when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, they mocked.* And at the 24th verse of this 26th chapter, when he spake of the resurrection, Festus told

him, he would hear him no farther, and that he looked upon him as a man *beside himself, whom much learning had made mad.* Festus looked upon this business of the resurrection as the wild speculation of a crazy head. And indeed the heathens generally, even those who believed the immortality of the soul, and another state after this life, looked upon the resurrection of the body as a thing impossible. Pliny, I remember, reckons it among those things which are impossible, and which God himself cannot do; “*revocare defunctos, to call back the dead to life:*” and in the primitive times, the heathen philosophers very much derided the Christians, upon account of this strange doctrine of the resurrection, looking always upon this article of their faith, as a ridiculous and impossible assertion.

So easy is it for prejudice to blind the minds of men, and to represent every thing to them, which hath a great appearance of difficulty in it, as impossible. But I shall endeavour to shew, that if the matter be thoroughly examined, there is no ground for any such apprehension. I proceed therefore to the

Second proposition; namely, that this apprehension, that it is an incredible thing that God should raise the dead, is very unreasonable: *why should it be thought a thing incredible with you, that God should raise the dead?* That is, there is no sufficient reason, why any man should look upon the resurrection of the dead, as a thing impossible to the power of God; the only reason why they thought it incredible, being because they judged it impossible: so that nothing can be vainer, than for men to pretend to believe the resurrection; and yet at the same time to grant it to be a thing in reason impossible, because no man can believe that which he thinks to be incredible; and the impossibility of a thing is the best reason any man can have to think a thing incredible. So that the meaning of St. Paul's question is, *why should it be thought a thing impossible, that God should raise the dead?*

To come then to the business: I shall endeavour to shew, that there is no sufficient reason, why men should look upon the resurrection of the dead, as a thing impossible to God. *Why should it be thought a thing incredible (that is, impossible) with you, that God should raise the dead?*

dead? which question implies in it these three things:

1. That it is above the power of nature to raise the dead.
2. But it is not above the power of God to raise the dead. And,
3. That God should be able to do this, is by no means incredible to natural reason.

1st, This question implies, that it is above the power of nature to raise the dead; and therefore the Apostle puts the question very cautiously, *why should it be thought incredible, that God should raise the dead?* by which he seems to grant, that it is impossible to any natural power to raise the dead; which is granted on all hands.

2dly, But this question does plainly imply that it is not above the power of God to do this. Though the raising of the dead to life, be a thing above the power of nature, yet why should it be thought incredible that God, who is the author of nature, should be able to do this? and indeed the apostle's putting the question in this manner takes away the main ground of this objection against the resurrection, from the impossibility of the thing. For the main reason, why it was looked upon as impossible, was, because it was contrary to the course of nature, that there should be any return from a perfect privation to a habit, and that a body perfectly dead should be restored to life again: but for all this, no man that believes a God, who made the world, and this natural frame of things, but must think it very reasonable to believe, that he can do things far above the power of any thing that he hath made.

3dly, This question implies that it is not a thing incredible to natural reason, that God should be able to raise the dead. I do not say, that by natural light we can discover that God will raise the dead; for that, depending merely upon the will of God, can no otherwise be certainly known than by divine revelation: but that God can do this, is not at all incredible to natural reason. And this is sufficiently implied in the question which St. Paul asks; in which he appeals to Festus and Agrippa, neither of them Christians, *why should it be thought a thing incredible with you, that God should raise the dead?* And why should he appeal to them concerning the credibility of this matter if

it be a thing incredible to natural reason?

That it is not, I shall first endeavour to prove, and then to answer the chief objections against the possibility of it.

And I prove it thus: it is not incredible to natural reason, that God made the world, and all the creatures in it; that mankind is *his offspring*; and that *he gives us life and breath, and all things*. This was acknowledged and firmly believed by many of the heathens. And indeed, whoever believes that the being of God may be known by natural light, must grant, that it may be known by the natural light of reason, that God made the world; because one of the chief arguments for the being of God, is taken from those visible effects of wisdom, and power, and goodness, which we see in the frame of the world. Now he that can do the greater, can undoubtedly do the less; he that made all things of nothing, can much more raise a body out of the dust; he who at first gave life to so many inanimate beings, can easily restore that which is dead to life again. It is an excellent saying of one of the Jewish rabbies: *that he who made that which was not, to be, can certainly make that which was once, to be again*. This hath the force of a demonstration; for no man that believes that God hath done the one, can make any doubt, but that he can, if he please, do the other.

This seems to be so very clear, that they must be strong objections indeed, that can render it incredible.

There are but two that I know of, that are of any consideration, and I shall not be afraid to represent them to you with their utmost advantage; and they are these:

First, against the resurrection in general: it is pretended impossible, after the bodies of men are resolved into dust, to recollect all the dispersed parts, and bring them together, to be united into one body.

The second is levelled against the resurrection in some particular instances, and pretends it to be impossible in some cases only, viz. when that which was the matter of one man's body, does afterward become the matter of another man's body; in which case, say they, it is impossible that both these should, at the resurrection, each have their own body.

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The difficulty of both these objections is perfectly avoided by those who hold, that it is not necessary that our bodies at the resurrection should consist of the very same parts of matter that they did before. There being no such great difference between one parcel of dust and another; neither in respect of the power of God, which can as easily command this parcel of dust as that to become a living body, and being united to a living soul to rise up and walk; so that the miracle of the resurrection will be all one in the main, whether our bodies be made of the very same matter they were before, or not: nor will there be any difference as to us; for whatever matter our bodies be made of, when they are once re-united to our souls, they will be then as much our own, as if they had been made of the very same matter of which they consisted before. Beside that, the change which the resurrection will make in our bodies, will be so great, that we could not know them to be the same, though they were so.

Now upon this supposition, which seems philosophical enough, the force of both these objections is wholly declined. But there is no need to fly to this refuge; and therefore I will take this article of the resurrection in the strictest sense for the raising of a body to life, consisting of the same individual matter that it did before; and in this sense, I think, it hath generally been received by Christians, not without ground, from Scripture. I will only mention one text, which seems very strongly to imply it; *and the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and the grave delivered up the dead which were in them; and they were judged every man according to his works.* (Rev. xx. 13.) Now why should the sea and the grave be said to deliver up their dead, if there were not a resurrection of the same body; for any dust formed into a living body and united to the soul, would serve the turn? We will therefore take it for granted, that the very same body shall be raised, and I doubt not, even in this sense, to vindicate the possibility of the resurrection from both these objections.

First, against the resurrection in general of the same body; it is pretended impossible, after the bodies of men are mouldered into the dust, and by infinite accidents have been scattered up and down

the world, and have undergone a thousand changes, to recollect and rally together the very same parts of which they consisted before. This the heathens used to object to the primitive Christians; for which reason they also used to burn the bodies of martyrs, and to scatter their ashes in the air, to be blown about by the wind, in derision of their hopes of a resurrection.

I know not how strong malice might make this objection to appear; but surely in reason it is very weak; for it wholly depends upon a gross mistake of the nature of God and his providence, as if it did not extend to the smallest things; as if God did not know all things that he hath made, and had them not always in his view, and perfectly under his command; and as if it were a trouble and burden to infinite knowledge and power to understand and order the least things: whereas infinite knowledge and power can know and manage all things, with as much ease as we can understand and order any one thing.

So that this objection is grounded upon a low and false apprehension of the divine nature, and is only fit for Epicurus his herd, who fancied to themselves a sort of slothful and unthinking deities, whose happiness consisted in their laziness, and a privilege to do nothing. I proceed therefore to the

Second objection, which is more close and pressing; and this is levelled against the resurrection in some particular instances. I will mention but two, by which all the rest may be measured and answered.

One is, of those who are drowned in the sea, and their bodies eaten up by fishes, and turned into their nourishment: and those fishes perhaps eaten afterward by men, and converted into the substance of their bodies.

The other is of the cannibals; some of whom, as credible relations tell us, have lived wholly or chiefly on the flesh of men; and consequently the whole, or the greatest part of the substance of their bodies is made of the bodies of other men. In these and the like cases, wherein one man's body is supposed to be turned into the substance of another man's body, how should both these at the resurrection each recover his own body? So that this objection

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ection is like that of the Sadducees to our Saviour, concerning a woman that had seven husbands: they ask, *whose wife of the seven shall she be at the resurrection?* So here, when several have had the same body, whose shall it be at the resurrection? and how shall they be supplied that have it not?

This is the objection: and in order to answering of it, I shall premise these two things:

1. That the body of man is not a constant and permanent thing, always continuing in the same state, and consisting of the same matter: but a successive thing, which is continually spending, and continually renewing itself, every day losing something of the matter which it had before, and gaining new; so that most men have new bodies, oftener than they have new clothes; only with this difference, that we change our clothes commonly at once, but our bodies by degrees.

And this is undeniably certain from experience. For so much as our bodies grow, so much new matter is added to them, over and beside the repairing of what is continually spent; and after a man be come to his full growth, so much of his food as every day turns into nourishment, so much of his yesterday's body is usually waited, and carried off by insensible perspiration, that is, breathed out at the pores of his body; which according to the static experiment of Sanctorius a learned physician, who for several years together weighed himself exactly every day, is (as I remember) according to the proportion of five to eight, of all that a man eats and drinks. Now according to this proportion, every man must change his body several times in a year.

It is true indeed, the more solid parts of the body, as the bones, do not change so often as the fluid and fleshy; but that they also do change, is certain, because they grow, and whatever grows is nourished and spends, because otherwise it would not need to be repaired.

2. The body which a man hath at any time of his life, is as much his own body, as that which he hath at his death; so that if the very matter of his body, which a man had at any time of his life, be raised, it is as much his own and the same body, as that which he had at his death, and commonly much more perfect; because

they who die of lingering sickness, or old age, are usually mere skeletons when they die; so that there is no reason to suppose, that the very matter of which our bodies consist at the time of our death, shall be that which shall be raised; that being commonly the worst, and most imperfect body of all the rest.

These two things being premised, the answer to this objection cannot be difficult. For as to the more solid and firm parts of the body, as the skull and bones, it is not I think pretended that the cannibals eat them: and if they did, so much of the matter, even of these solid parts, wastes away in a few years, as being collected together would supply them many times over. And as for the fleshy and fluid parts, these are so very often changed and renewed, that we can allow the cannibals to eat them all up, and to turn them all into nourishment, and yet no man need contend for want of a body of his own at the resurrection, viz. any of those bodies which he had ten or twenty years before; which are every whit as good, and as much his own, as that which was eaten.

You will pardon me, I hope, that I have dwelt so long upon so contentious an argument, when you consider how necessary what I have said is to the vindication of so great an article of our religion; and especially in this evil age of unbelief, when greater matters than this are called in question.

Having thus shewn that the resurrection is not a thing incredible to natural reason, I should now proceed to shew the certainty of it from divine revelation. For as reason tells us, it is not impossible; so the word of God hath assured us, that it is certain. The texts of scripture are so many and clear to this purpose, and so well known to all Christians, that I will produce none. I shall only tell you, that as it is expressly revealed in the gospel, so our blessed Saviour, for the confirmation of our faith, and the comfort and encouragement of our hope, hath given us the experiment of it in his own resurrection, which is *the earnest and first fruits of ours*. So St. Paul tells us, that *Christ is risen from the dead, and become the first fruits of them that slept*. And that Christ did really rise from the dead, we have as good evidence, as for any ancient matter

matter of fact which we do most firmly believe; and more and greater evidence than this, the thing is not capable of; and because it is not, no reasonable man ought to require it.

Now what remains, but to conclude this discourse with those practical inferences which our apostle makes from this doctrine of the resurrection; and I shall mention these two:

The first for our support and comfort under the infirmities and miseries of this mortal life.

The second for the encouragement of obedience and a good life.

1. For our comfort and support under the infirmities and miseries of this mortal state. The consideration of the glorious change of our bodies at the resurrection of the just, cannot but be a great comfort to us, under all bodily pain and sufferings.

One of the greatest burdens of human nature is the frailty and infirmity of our bodies, the necessities they are frequently pressed withal, the manifold diseases they are liable to, and the dangers and terrors of death, to which they are continually subject and enslaved. But the time is coming, if we be careful to prepare ourselves for it, when we shall be clothed with other kind of bodies, free from all the miseries and inconveniencies which flesh and blood is subject to. For *these vile bodies shall be changed, and fashioned like to the glorious body of the Son of God*. When our bodies shall be raised to a new life, they shall become incorruptible; for *this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality; and then shall come to pass the saying that is written, death is swallowed up in victory*. When this last enemy is conquered, there shall be no *fleshy lusts*, nor brutish passions, to fight against the soul; no law in our members, to war against the law of our minds; no disease to torment us, no danger of death to amaze and terrify us. Then all the passions and appetites of our outward man shall be subject to the reason of our minds, and our bodies shall partake of the immortality of our souls. It is but a very little while, that our spirits shall be crushed, and clogged with these heavy and sluggish bodies; at the resurrection they shall be refined from all dregs of corruption, and become spiri-

tual, and incorruptible, and glorious, and every way suited to the activity and perfection of a glorified soul, and *the spirits of just men made perfect*.

2. For the encouragement of obedience and a good life. Let the belief of this great article of our faith have the same influence upon us, which St. Paul tells us it had upon him. *I have hope toward God, that there shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust; and herein do I exercise myself, always to have a conscience void of offence, toward God and toward men.* (Acts, xxiv. 15, 16.)

The firm belief of a resurrection to another life should make every one of us very careful how we demean ourselves in this life, and afraid to do any thing, or to neglect any thing, that may defeat our hopes of a blessed immortality, and expose us to the extreme and endless misery of body and soul in another life.

Particularly, it should be an argument to us, *to glorify God in our bodies, and in our spirits*; and to use the members of the one, and the faculties of the other, as *instruments of righteousness, unto holiness*. We should reverence ourselves, and take heed, not only how we defile our souls by sinful passions, but how we dishonour our bodies by sensual and brutish lusts; since God hath designed so great an honour and happiness for both at the resurrection.

So often as we think of a blessed resurrection to eternal life, and the happy consequences of it, the thoughts of so glorious a reward should make us diligent and unwearied in the service of so good a master, and so great a prince, who can and will prefer us to infinitely greater honours, than any that are to be had in this world. This inference the apostle makes from the doctrine of the resurrection. *Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast and unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord; forasmuch as ye know that your labour shall not be in vain in the Lord.* (1 Cor. xv. 58.)

Nay, we may begin this blessed state while we are upon earth, by *setting our hearts and affections upon the things that are above, and having our conversation in heaven, from whence also we look for a Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ; who shall change our vile bodies, that they may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according*

the working whereby he is able to subdue all things to himself.

Now the God of peace, who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus Christ, the great shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make us perfect in every good work to do his will, working in us always that which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever. Amen.

SERMON XCI.

By DR. SAMUEL CLARKE,
Of St. James's.

On Prayer.

ROMANS, xii. latter part of ver. 12.

Continuing instant in prayer.

THE worship of God, as it is in the law the first and great commandment, the principal foundation and support of all religion; so it is likewise in itself a most reasonable service, most fit and becoming the state and condition of mankind. Creatures inferior to men must obey the will of God by the necessity of their nature, without any choice of the will, and are therefore incapable of paying properly any worship to God, though they glorify him continually by affording matter for his praise. Creatures superior to men do, on the contrary, by so perfect a choice of the will, continually worship God with an entire and uninterrupted service, that they are probably very little more in danger of choosing to oppose themselves to the will of God, than the inferior creation is in any possibility of doing it. Man, who is as it were placed in the middle between creatures earthly and heavenly, is indued with faculties which enable him clearly to understand the obligation lying upon him to obey constantly the will of God: and yet at the same time is encompassed with such weaknesses, as make him stand in need of perpetual assistance; to enable him to live up in any tolerable measure to the obligations he is under. Upon this, is founded principally the duty of prayer; which is upon earth the primary and the greatest part of divine worship, as thanksgiving is the chief and larger part of the same worship in heaven. Obedience, it-

self, or the practice of virtue and righteousness, in imitation of God, and in compliance with his commands, is indeed still more excellent than either of these: being in the sight of God, as much more valuable than either prayer or thanksgiving; as the duty of charity or universal good-will to mankind, is, in St. Paul's estimation, to be preferred before the virtues of faith or hope. Behold, *to obey is better than sacrifice; and to hearken, than the fat of rams*: the meaning is, that a virtuous and good life is better not only than Jewish rites and ceremonies, but better even than the best of any other worship, that is paid to God either on earth or heaven. Nevertheless, as the one ought above all things to be done, so the other ought not by any means to be left undone. As God is to be obeyed, so he is to be worshipped also: nay, the worshipping him is a part of that very obedience, and a means to enable men to perform more acceptably the other parts of their obedience to him. It is in itself a fit and most reasonable service, that we who know we receive all from him, should acknowledge that we do so, by asking of him. It is a high privilege, that we are permitted to approach the Father of all things, and have access to the throne of supreme glory. It is, in the natural consequence of the thing itself, a means of promoting the practice of virtue, by putting the mind habitually into good temper and frame: and it is moreover, by the appointment of God, a condition requisite in order to obtain his blessing upon our endeavours; because he has promised, that he will be *nigh unto all them that call upon him, yea, unto all them that call upon him faithfully*; that he will fulfil the desire of them that fear him, that he will also bear their cry and will help them. (Psalm cxlv. 18.) Which promise our Saviour confirms by a most affectionate comparison, when he argues, from the love of a father toward his children, how much more ready God is to assist those who worthily apply to him: *Ask, faith he, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find:—If a son shall ask bread of any of you that is a father, will he give him a stone? or if he ask a fish, will he for a fish give him a serpent? or if he shall ask an egg, will he offer him a scorpion? If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children; how much more shall your heavenly*

heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him. (Luke, xi. 9.)

The reasonableness and necessity of the duty of prayer in general, being thus apparent both in scripture and in the nature of the thing itself; shall, in the following discourse, for our more particular instruction in so important a duty of religion, consider distinctly, 1st, The object of prayer, or the person to whom it is to be directed; 2dly, The things proper to be prayed for; and 3dly, The circumstances or qualifications necessary to make the person who prays, and the petitions which he puts up, acceptable before God.

I. First, the object of prayer, or the person to whom prayers are to be directed, is God. *Unto thee, O God, shall the vow be performed; thou that hearest the prayer, unto thee shall all flesh come. (Psal. lxxv. 1.)* This is the obvious voice of nature; that application should be made by all creatures, for a continual supply of all their wants, to the supreme Father and Governor of all, who is *above all, and through all, and in all*; or, as the scripture in another place with no less elegance expresses it, *of whom and through whom and to whom are all things.* This is the first and great commandment, in nature as well as in revelation. And it is very observable, as St. Paul at large demonstrates in the first chapter to the Romans, that in proportion as the heathen world departed from this original and natural worship of the Maker of all things, to the feigning for themselves a multitude of gods; so did the corruption of their manners likewise increase in all other instances of immorality, till they were *given over to a reprobate mind, to work all unrighteousness with greediness.* The foundation of prayer is laid in the attributes of God; and every perfection of his nature affords a distinct ground or reason for our applying ourselves in this manner to him. His omnipresence teaches us, that he is ever near; his omniscience, that he always knows our petitions; his omnipotence, that he is able to grant them; his goodness, that he is willing to give us whatever is for our real benefit and advantage; his truth, that he will not fail to perform all his gracious promises; and his mercy, that he will not reject even sinners when truly penitent, but will hear and forgive them upon their sincere humiliation and amend-

ment. Thus all the attributes of God afford so many several reasons, and distinct motives or arguments, to encourage us in the duty of prayer to him. Nor can it here reasonably be objected, that God, by reason of his omniscience, knows already what we want before we ask for it; and, by reason of his goodness, will do what is fit, whether we ask for it or no; and that therefore the putting up of prayers to him is needless. This (I say) is no just objection. For as to the first part of this difficulty, his knowing already what we want before we ask for it, the answer is evident; that the design of our putting up petitions to him, is not for his information, but for a testimony of our acknowledgment of our dependence upon him. We do not ask of God, in order to acquaint him what things we stand in need of; but to express the sense we ourselves have of his being alone able to supply our wants, and of his being the only author of every good gift. And then as to the second part of the objection, viz. our being sure that his goodness will always move him to do *what is in itself fit*, whether we ask it or no, the answer is no less plain; that that very fitness of things, which is considered in the present case, arises in great measure from the qualification of the persons; and one principal qualification, which makes any person fit to receive blessings from God, is that disposition of mind, from whence proceedeth prayer out of a pure heart, and with lips unfeigned. God therefore will indeed always do what is fit, whether men ask it of him or no; but this is no reason to neglect his worship: because, if men refuse to pay him this just and small tribute, it will upon that very account become a thing fit and reasonable in itself, that they should fall short of the divine blessings. Every attribute of God, therefore, is a just ground and reason of prayer to him; and a sufficient argument also, why prayer should be offered unto him alone. To pray to inferior beings, to angels or to departed saints, as has long been the practice of the church of Rome, is evidently needless; because God, we are sure, is always near, being himself every where present. It is moreover presumption and great vanity; *an intruding into things which men have not seen, being vainly puffed up by their fleshly mind, and taking upon themselves*

elves to be *wise above what is written*: or they do not so much as pretend that praying to saints and angels is any where commanded. Lastly, it does plainly derogate from the honour of God, because it distracts men's devotions, and divides that affection and reliance of mind, which ought to be placed upon God alone. If it be alleged, that frail and sinful men cannot of themselves acceptably approach the supreme throne of God, we have, by divine appointment, a sufficient mediator and *advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous*, who sitteth continually on the right hand of God, as our great high-priest and intercessor, to mediate for us, and to offer up our prayers unto the Father. *Through him alone we all have an access*, as St. Paul expresses it, *by one spirit unto the Father* (Eph. ii. 18.); and our Lord's own direction is, *Whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name, he will give it you*. And, when we pray, say, *Our Father which art in heaven*: and again, *The hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth*. (John, xv. 16.) This therefore is the direction the scripture gives us, concerning the object of prayer; that prayer is to be directed to God through Christ. And as praying to false gods derogates from the honour of the one true God, so praying by or through the intercession of false and fictitious mediators, derogates in like manner from the honour of Christ, the only true mediator. *For as there is one God, so there is also*, saith the apostle, *one mediator between God and men; and they who hold not this head*, (speaking of angel-worshippers, who join other mediators with him whom alone God has appointed to that office,) *they beguile themselves* (says he) *of their reward*. (Col. ii. 18.) Errors of this sort have been the general sin of mankind in all ages; and it is very unaccountable, how greedily even Christians, after the clearest revelation of the will of God, have run into the same mistake. This therefore may suffice concerning the first head, namely the object of prayer, or the person to whom prayers are to be directed.

II. Secondly, I proposed to consider in the next place, the things that are proper to be prayed for. And here, there cannot be given any particular directions, which will exactly suit the circumstances

of different persons. Every one best understands his own wants and necessities; and if his prayers be not mere forms, he will in his own heart naturally adjust them to his own circumstances: and, for exactness or propriety of expression, to this God has no regard. All the advice that can be given, is, in general, that men consider, according to the best of their abilities, what is suitable to the nature of God to give, and proper for them to ask. We are to pray for every thing that is good, and against every thing that is evil; for ourselves and for others; for all mankind; even for those that are our enemies; that God would convert them, and bring them finally to salvation. We are to pray for the forgiveness of past sins; and that we may be preserved from such as we might fall into for the future. In a word, for a competent measure of all the good things of the present life, and above all things, that we fall not short of the happiness of that to come. The method our Saviour has laid down in the form of his own composing, is the best direction in this case. He teaches us to pray, in the first place, that the honour and kingdom of God may be advanced among men, by the practice of virtue, and by our obedience to his will: according to the direction he elsewhere gives, that we should first *seek the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and that then all other things should be added unto us*. For want of observing which direction, St. James declares to some in his time, *Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts*. (Jam. iv. 3.) That which to every good man cannot but be first and principal in the desire of his heart, (namely, the improvement of himself and others in true religion,) ought also to be, and naturally will be, the primary subject of his prayers. Some devout persons have, in this matter, run into the contrary extreme; and because we are indeed weak and dependent creatures, and can do nothing without the divine assistance, therefore they have supposed and taught, that men can do nothing at all for themselves as to any religious improvement, but must rely wholly upon God to do every thing for them and in them: not considering that spiritual abilities are derived from God, and depend on him, just in the same manner as all natural powers and faculties do;

do; in which it is evident God does not act for us, but gives us power to act for ourselves; and therefore in spiritual matters likewise, God so gives us to will and to do, as that by his giving us those powers, we are obliged therewith to work out our own salvation. For a continual supply therefore of these powers, and for the assistance of the Divine Spirit in the use of them, we are bound to pray; and we cannot innocently want them, because God has promised that he will give his Holy Spirit to them that sincerely ask him.

Next, after these spiritual blessings, our Saviour directs us to pray for our *daily bread*; for the necessities and conveniences of this temporal life: to shew us, that his religion does not teach men to neglect the world wholly, and to be useless in it; but only not to abuse it by sensuality and debauchery.

And because we are subject to daily infirmities, he teaches us in the next place to pray daily for the *forgiveness of our sins*: in which part of our petitions, sincere minds ought to take care, that we pray not in mere form for the forgiveness of sins equally, which we have or have not committed; but that we really desire to amend those faults, which we particularly pray to have forgiven.

Lastly, Because no man knows his own strength for the future, our Lord directs us to pray that we may escape great temptations, and that we fall not under the power of the evil one.

These are the best directions that can be given, concerning the matter or things to be prayed for: which directions being of necessity no other than general, are and must be left to be diversified in particular, according to every man's own sense of his private and personal wants.

III. Thirdly, the third and last thing I proposed, was to consider the circumstances or qualifications necessary to make the person who prays, and the petitions which he puts up, acceptable before God. And,

1st, All prayer must be accompanied with attention of mind. This our Saviour expresses by that variation of phrase, *Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you.* (Matt. vii. 7.) Where the heart and mind goes not along with the mouth, prayer is but an empty form; and the ex-

pression of the prophet may justly be applied: *This people draws near me with their lips, but their heart is far from me.* Such persons have no reason, and indeed seem not much to expect, that their prayers should be heard: *but the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.* (Jam. v. 16.)

2dly, Prayers must be put up with constancy, importunity, and perseverance. *Pray,* says the apostle, *without ceasing.* (1 Thess. v. 17.) And our Saviour spake two parables; one concerning a man persuaded by his friend's importunity to rise in the night, and lend him what he wanted; and the other concerning an unjust judge, prevailed upon by the importunity of a poor widow to do her justice: these two parables, says the evangelist, spake Jesus, *to the end that men ought always to pray, and not to faint.* (Luke, xviii. 1; and xi. 5.) The meaning is, not that men are to spend their whole time in prayers, which is the monkish superstition; or that enthusiasts, who pride themselves in the length of their prayers, shall be heard the better for their much speaking; but that it is needful for men, by constant and periodical returns of prayer, to keep up in their minds a continual sense of God, and of their dependence upon him.

3dly, Prayer must always be with submission to the will of God. Our judgments are very weak and fallible; and we often know not what will hurt or profit us. The things therefore which we most earnestly desire, and which we may very lawfully pray for; yet ought always to be submitted to the infinite wisdom and good pleasure of God. *We know not,* saith St. Paul, *what we should pray for as we ought* (Rom. viii. 26.); and, *Ye know not what ye ask* (Matt. xx. 22.), saith our Lord to two of his apostles. And he himself has set us an example beyond all exception: *Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me; nevertheless, not my will, but thine be done.* (Luke, xxii. 42.)

4thly, Prayers must be put up with steady faith toward God. *But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering.* (Jam. i. 6.) And *what things soever,* saith our Saviour, *ye desire when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them.* It must be observed, that this remarkable promise is made expressly concerning the gift of miracles; concerning removing

a moun-

a mountain, and cast it into the sea; as it is in the verse before; and must not be applied to any other persons or things, but where that singular gift was expressly promised. In other cases, and times, the faith toward God, which is requisite in prayer, must be understood in proportion, to be, not a vain enthusiastical presumption, of being sure to obtain whatever we desire, (of which no promise was ever made us,) but a rational persuasion, and firm belief, that God is able to perform whatever he wills, and willing to do for us whatever is really fit and reasonable. The greatest objection that vain men have ever made in this case against the faith I am speaking of, is, that things seem regularly to proceed in the course of nature, and according to the efficiency of second causes; and that therefore, *What is the Almighty, that we should serve him? and what profit should we have if we pray unto him?* (Job. xxi. 15.) But the answer is plain, that second causes are nothing more than instruments in the hand of the first cause. For though men are apt to imagine, that those things only which are miraculous do immediately evidence the power of God; yet, in reality, the things which we call natural, do perfectly evidence the same power. Only, what the power of God does constantly and regularly, we are too apt to forget proceeds from that power; and we ascribe it to nature, which is nothing at all, but a mere empty word. For as if from the constant and regular continuance of the day-light, men should cease to observe that there is such a thing as the sun in the heavens, from whence that light proceeds; so it is equally absurd to imagine, that the effects of nature (as we call them) could regularly go on, without the being and providence of God, who is indeed the alone cause of those effects. No man, inquiring after the architect of a most perfect building, would take it for a satisfactory answer, to be told that it was natural for the fabric to be built in that form. Yet the case is exactly the same, when men contentedly exclude the consideration of God, merely by styling his workmanship the effects of nature.

5thly, As acceptable prayers must be

put up with steady faith toward God, so must they also with charity and forgiveness toward men. For he that is cruel and unmerciful toward a man like himself, how should he expect forgiveness at the hands of God! Our Lord has interwoven the necessity of this qualification into the very expression of our daily prayer. And by that most affectionate parable of the servant, who being forgiven ten thousand talents, refused to forgive his fellow-servant one hundred pence; he has taught us upon what conditions we may expect that our heavenly Father will forgive us.

Lastly, Prayers must be offered up with pure hands, and with a clean heart; that is to say, God will be worshipped by those only who sincerely desire to obey him. The prayers and sacrifices, and all the external devotions that a wicked man is capable of performing, are but so many mockeries and provocations of God. *He that turneth away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer shall be abomination.* (Prov. xxviii. 9.) And this ends in the same observation, wherewith I began upon this subject; and which is indeed the first and the last truth, in the right understanding of religion, viz. that the worship or sacrifice most acceptable to God, is the obedience of a virtuous and religious life.

There are several other heads under which prayer may be distinguished. As private prayer; concerning which our Saviour gives large directions in the sixth chapter of St. Matthew. Family prayer; concerning which may be understood that character of Abraham, *I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord.* (Gen. xviii. 19.) And lastly, public prayer in the assemblies of the church; for the public acknowledgment of God's power and glory among men: concerning each of which there needs no enlargement; what has been said in the foregoing discourse concerning prayer in general, being easily applicable in every one's mind to each of these heads in particular.

S E R M O N XCII.

On the Ascension of our Lord; or,
Holy Thursday.

H E B R E W S, viii. 1.

Now of the things which we have spoken, this is the sum: we have such an High Priest, who is set on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens.

IN the foregoing chapter, the apostle sets forth at large the excellency of our Saviour's perpetual and unchangeable priesthood: by comparing it with that mutable and successive one among the Jews, ver. 23. *They truly were many priests, because they were not suffered to continue by reason of death: but this man, because he continueth ever, hath an unchangeable priesthood. Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them. For such an High Priest became us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens. Who needeth not daily, as those high priests, to offer up sacrifice, first for his own sins, and then for the people's; but has, by one offering of himself, for ever perfected them that are sanctified. The full explication of this doctrine, and of the consequences of it, is the subject of this whole epistle: and a brief summary of it is given us in the words of the text: Now of the things which we have spoken, this is the sum: we have such an High Priest, who is set on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens.*

Our Lord, after his resurrection, as we find it recorded in the gospels and in the history of the Acts, *shewed himself alive to his disciples by many infallible proofs, being seen of them forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God; conversing with them familiarly, opening their understandings; expounding to them the scriptures, explaining to them in all the prophets the things concerning himself, directing them in what manner they should preach the gospel to all nations, and promising to be with them by the assistance of his spirit even unto the end of the world. By which means, when they were fully instructed for the execution of their office, he departed from them, ascending visibly into heaven, in such a manner as is described by St. Paul under the prophetic words of the*

psalmist, when he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men: now — he that descended, is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens, that he might fill all things. From thenceforth, therefore, we have (as the text expresses it) such an High Priest, who is set on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens.

The word heaven, when applied to the omnipresent God, as in that expression of Solomon, *God is in heaven, and thou upon earth, therefore let thy words be few*; and in that compellation wherewith our Lord begins his prayer, *Our Father which art in heaven*; the word heaven, I say, when thus applied to God, does not signify literally a particular place, in point of situation; but figuratively, a state of highest dignity and supreme dominion: for God, being essentially present every where, cannot be really and literally in one place more than in another. But he can make particular manifestations of his glory when and where and how he pleases: and where he does this in the most conspicuous manner, that place is called, by way of eminence, his habitation, his throne, his presence. Now because the heavens are higher than the earth; because thence are derived all beneficial influences upon this lower world; because there is the habitation of angels, attending upon the commands of God; therefore God, who is really and essentially present every where alike, yet with regard to the exercise of his power and the manifestation of his glory, is to us represented as being particularly in heaven. And thither therefore did our Lord Jesus Christ accordingly ascend, to the highest place of glory and dignity, to the most immediate presence of the majesty of God, to his Father and our Father, to his God and our God; and sat down (as the text with great elegance expresses it) *on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens.*

This phrase, *the Majesty*, used thus absolutely and indefinitely, without mentioning the person to whom it belongs, is, in a very sublime and emphatical manner, expressive of the super-eminent glory and majesty of God. It sets forth to us in such a sense, the singular and transcendent glory of the Divine Majesty, as that, comparatively speaking, there is no other Majesty but his. Thus, in

in other places of scripture, when God is styled absolutely, and by way of eminence, *the holy one; the blessed*, (as Mark, xiv. 61. *Art thou the Christ, the son of the blessed?*) *the power*, (as in the verse next following, *ye shall see the Son of Man sitting on the right hand of power*,) *the excellent glory*, (as 2 Pet. i. 17. *There came such a voice to him from the excellent glory*,) the sense of these expressions is, that, comparatively speaking, there is none holy, none blessed, none powerful, none glorious, but he alone. Good men are in scripture frequently styled *holy*; and angels are the *holy angels of God*; and yet of him and to him alone it is said, *thou only art holy*. Angels and the souls of men are immortal; and yet of him it is in a most just sense affirmed, that he only hath immortality. Others have wisdom ascribed to them in their degree and order, and yet he nevertheless is God only wise. Others are, in their rank and proportion, truly and justly called good; and yet our Lord, with peculiar emphasis and high propriety, declares there is none good, but one, that is God. The scripture, without any scruple, calls temporal deliverers, saviours. (Nehem. ix. 27.) And our Lord Jesus Christ, in the spiritual and infinitely higher sense, is, by way of eminence, styled our Saviour: and yet the Father Almighty, (who in St. Paul's language, Tit. iii. 4, 5. is God our Saviour which *saves us through Jesus Christ our Saviour*,) declares concerning himself, *beside me, there is no Saviour*. (Isaiah, xliii. 11.) The manner of speaking is very just, as well as lofty and sublime; and it is useful and proper, in order to keep up in men's minds a due and awful sense of the supreme and unapproachable greatness of God. Others have power ascribed to them, and dominion and majesty; there are, as St. Paul tells us, *gods many, and lords many, in heaven and in earth*. (1 Cor. viii. 5.) Some falsely so called; others rightly, in such a sense as the scripture gives the title of gods and lords to angels and to men: yet, for all that, there is still really no other God but one; and the Majesty, absolutely speaking, is his alone. Our High Priest *is set on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens*.

The term, *right hand*, when applied to God, is not to be understood literally, as

denoting a particular situation with regard to place (for God has no hands, no shape or parts); but it signifies figuratively a state of high dignity, dominion, and power, next and immediately after God the Father himself. Our Saviour's being advanced to the right hand of God, is his being actually invested with that glory and dignity, for the joy of which, when it was set before him, he willingly *endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God* (Heb. xii. 2.); that is, has overcome death, and entered into his kingdom of glory. And therefore, in other places of scripture, the very same notion is set forth under the parallel expressions, that *him hath God exalted with his right hand, to be a Prince and Saviour; to be Lord both of the dead and living; to be the head of all principality and power, the head over all things to the church; that he hath given him all power both in heaven and earth, and put all things in subjection under his feet; angels, and authorities, and powers being made subject unto him; that he has appointed him heir of all things, and according to the working of his mighty power, has set him far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come; that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father*. All which exalted characters are emphatically included in this one figurative expression, the right hand of God, the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens.

Lastly, the word, *sitting or being set*, is likewise to be understood, not literally as denoting a particular corporeal posture; (for in other places of Scripture it is expressed that our Lord is at the right hand of God, or that he stands at the right hand of God;) but the word, *sitting*, is for this reason more frequently used in the case before us, because it implies, in its figurative use and signification, fullness of possession, and perpetuity of retaining the glory possessed. *After he had offered one sacrifice for sins, he for ever sat down on the right hand of God; from henceforth expecting, till his enemies be made his footstool; for by one offering he hath perfected*

for ever them that are sanctified. (Heb. xi. 12.) From the time of our Lord's ascending into heaven, till his second coming to judgment, there were many ages to pass over: and therefore St. Peter in his sermon to the Jews, tells them, that *when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord, he shall send Jesus Christ which before was preached unto them; whom the heaven must receive, until the times of restitution of all things.* (Acts, iii. 19.)

The office which our Saviour executes during this his continuance in heaven, is signified to us in the text under the character of High Priest: *We have such an High Priest, who is set on the right hand of — the Majesty in the heavens.* And the explication of the nature of this office, as applied to our Lord, is the principal subject of this whole epistle. Upon which account, the words of the text are thus introduced by the apostle: *Of the things which we have spoken, this is the sum; we have such an High Priest, who is set on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens.* As, among the Jews, the high priest in the temple entered once a year into the holy place, with the blood of others, so Christ having *once in the end of the world put away sin by the sacrifice of himself*, it was necessary that he *with his own blood should enter once likewise into the holy place, into that within the veil, having obtained eternal redemption for us*; that is, it was necessary that he should ascend into heaven, to finish and present his most acceptable oblation before God, for the propitiation of the sins of the world. For so the apostle interprets it: *Christ (says he) is not entered into the holy places made with hands, which are only the figures of the true; but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us.*

The first and immediate effect of this appearing in the presence of God for us, was the mission of the Holy Ghost. Before our Saviour's exaltation, the Holy Ghost, says the evangelist, (speaking comparatively,) *was not yet given, because that Jesus was not yet glorified.* (John, vii. 39.) And our Lord himself: *I tell you the truth, says he; it is expedient for you, that I go away; for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you; and he will guide you into all truth.* Accordingly,

at the Pentecost after Christ's ascension, the Holy Ghost fell upon the apostles in a singular and most miraculous manner, beyond the examples of former inspirations. And by the continual assistance and ordinary operations of the same Spirit, has our Lord promised to be with us his true disciples, to be in the midst of them *wherever two or three are gathered together in his name, even unto the end of the world.*

But further: The scripture represents this our great High Priest, as continually interceding for us at the right hand of God, from the time of his ascension till his final coming to judgment. *We have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; and he is the propitiation for our sins.* For our sins; that is, for the sins of all those who truly repent and effectually amend their lives, according to the gracious terms of the gospel; and who are therefore accordingly represented as having *washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.* For persons of this disposition, our Saviour is a perpetual and effectual advocate, to obtain perfect forgiveness of their past sins, and to cleanse them, by the perpetual assistance of his Spirit, from all unrighteousness. They have an High Priest, not who cannot be touched with the feeling of their infirmities, but who was himself tempted in all points like as they are, yet without sin. And he is able also, as well as willing, to *save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them.* (Heb. vii. 25.) And because he thus lives for ever, and has an unchangeable priesthood, therefore he is said in scripture to be a priest, not after the order of Aaron, which was a perpetual succession of priests, not suffered to continue by reason of death; but after the order of Melchisedec, who was both prince and high priest, and of whom is recorded neither predecessor nor successor, that he might be a type and emblem of him who ever liveth to make intercession for us.

Some unbelievers there have been in all ages, and still are, who, in opposition to this great doctrine of Christianity, allege, that God being always omnipresent and ready to hear the prayers which every one offers for himself, therefore there was no need of appointing a mediator;

tor; and that God always acting ~~in his~~ own nature, according to the ~~exact right~~ and reason of the case, therefore ~~he can~~ not be changed, or have any affection moved, by the interposition of any intercessor whatsoever. But in this matter they greatly mistake. For if God's being himself every where present, were a sufficient reason why no mediator should be appointed to intercede for men; it would by the same argument be also a sufficient reason, why men should neither pray nor intercede for themselves: for God knows their wants as perfectly, even without their ever praying for themselves, as without a mediator interceding for them. If therefore, notwithstanding God's omnipresence and omniscience, it be still reasonable to require that men should pray for themselves, in order to keep up in their minds a constant sense of God, and that they may make continual acknowledgment of their dependance upon him; it may in like manner be very reasonable, in order to keep up in their minds a just sense of their own unworthiness, and of the true demerit of sin, to require of them, that through such a mediator only, as he has thought fit to appoint, should they have access to him who is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity. And though it be indeed very true, that by no intercession whatsoever, can God ever be moved to act otherwise than is agreeable to perfect right and reason; yet in cases of mercy and compassion, where the whole of what he does proceeds from mere free bounty; it is evident he may convey ~~those his~~ free gifts, in what manner, and upon what terms or conditions, and through what instruments he pleases; and may require their being accepted in that particular method, or not all. For however otherwise it be in all such cases where there is any claim of justice, or demand of right; yet undoubtedly, in dispensations of mere mercy, that which is true of every owner even among frail and mortal men, may with much greater propriety be said of God; shall he not do what and how he will with his own?

That which remains is, to draw two or three practical inferences from the whole of what has been said.

And 1st, From the doctrine of our Lord's sitting at the right hand of God to intercede continually for us, and to

govern his church by the mission of the Holy Ghost the Comforter, the apostle's inference is very natural: *Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.* (Heb. iv. 16.) Again, ch. x. 19. *Having boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, (i. e. having access to God through him,) by a new and living way which he has consecrated for us; and having an High Priest over the house of God; let us draw near with a true heart, in full assurance of faith. For he that spared not his own Son, (Rom. viii. 32.) how shall he not with him also freely give us all things? Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us.*

2dly, If we follow the example of our Lord's humility and righteousness here upon earth, we may hope through him to be made partakers also of his exaltation in heaven. *I go, says he, to prepare a place for you, and—I will come again, and receive you unto myself, that where I am, there ye may be also.* Again: *To him that overcometh, (that is, who perseveres in resisting the temptations of sin,) unto him will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my father in his throne.* These promises caused St. Paul so to express himself, as if God had already raised us up together with Christ, and made us already sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus. (Eph. ii. 6.) The manner of expression is highly figurative; but the literal and proper sense of it is what he elsewhere thus explains: *We have hope, says he, as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which entereth into that within the veil, whither our fore-runner is entered for us.* And if we have this hope in us, then ought we accordingly to set our affections on things above, not on things in the earth; that where our treasure is, there may our heart be also; that we may seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God, and where our life is hid, (that is, deposited, laid up for us in the determinations of the divine good pleasure, it is hid,) *with Christ in God: that our conversation (the thoughts of our home and final abode) may be in heaven, from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ; who, at his*

coming, shall so change us, that we shall become like him, when *we shall see him as he is*; and *as we have borne the image of the earthly, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly*. By employing our meditations in this manner, upon our Lord's state of exaltation in heaven, so as to make it a continual motive to us, to prepare ourselves to become finally partakers of that promised inheritance; we shall contribute what in us lies, toward fulfilling that prophecy which he spake before his death: *And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me.* (John, xii. 32.)

3dly, Another proper and most important use of the doctrine before us, is as follows:—If our Lord came down upon earth to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself; and if, in his state of exaltation in heaven, the design of his continual intercession with God, and of his whole government of the church by his Spirit, be still always one and the same, even the putting away of sin: then from hence we may learn how great and fatal a corruption it is of the Christian religion, for men who live wickedly, in a course of debauchery, or in the habitual practice of any known sin whatsoever, to expect to obtain salvation by relying presumptuously upon the merits of Christ, or upon his intercession, instead of obeying his commands delivered in the gospel. *The blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, was shed, not to render men safe in unrighteous living, but to purge the conscience of such as truly repent and amend, to purge them from dead works to serve the living God.* (Heb. ix. 14.) The end why our Lord gave himself for us, being, *that he might purify to himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works*. If this great end be attained; if (according to the language of St. John) *we walk in the light*, (that is, in the practice of true virtue and holiness,) *even as God is light, and in him is no darkness at all*; then indeed *the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all (past) sin*. But *if we have fellowship with him, and (still) walk in darkness*; (that is, continue to live wickedly, and yet hope for benefit from the profession of God's true religion from what Christ has either done or suffered for us;) *we lie, and do not the truth.* (1 John, i. 6.)

4thly and lastly, As from what has

been said, appears the reasonableness of men's applying to God through that one Mediator whom he has appointed; so at the same time appears likewise the folly of their setting up other mediators, of their own invention; such as are angels, saints, the Blessed Virgin, and the like. For *there is one God*, says the apostle, *and one Mediator between God and men*. And as departing from *the one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in us all*, is the first and highest species of idolatry; so another sort of the same sin, is setting up false and imaginary mediators, by will-worship, by a voluntary humility, as St. Paul styles it, *and worshipping of angels*, when men intrude into things which they have not seen, vainly puffed up by their fleshly mind, and not holding the head, from which all the body by joints and bands having nourishment ministered, and knit together, increaseth with the increase of God.

S E R M O N XCIII.

By Archbishop TILLOTSON.

On Whit-Sunday.

ACTS, ii. 1, 2, 3, 4.

And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a mighty rushing wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them cloven tongues, like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.

ONE of the chief designs of the dispensation of God toward the Jews, and of the giving of the law to them by Moses, was to be a type of the christian church, and of the dispensation of the gospel by the Son of God; and therefore no wonder, if there be a great correspondence between them, and that the Divine Providence should so order the event of things, that the seasons of dispensing the great evangelical blessings should happen at the same times when the great blessings of the law, which were the types of them, were dispensed and commemorated. Thus our Saviour, who was *the Lamb of God*, was slain and offered up at the same time

that

that the passover was kept, and the paschal lamb was slain and offered up among the Jews; and the redemption of the world from the slavery of sin and Satan, is celebrated by Christians, at the very same season of the year, when the Israelites from the Egyptian slavery was commemorated by them; and as at the time of Pentecost (which was fifty days after) the Jews were appointed to rejoice before the Lord, and to offer their first-fruits by way of grateful acknowledgment to God for the fruits of the earth, then newly gathered in; so did God likewise at the same time impart the first-fruits of the Holy Spirit to the apostles, who were to be the first and chief labourers in that spiritual harvest, to which they were appointed by the Lord of the harvest: and which is yet more remarkable, at the same season that the law was delivered to the Jews from mount Sinai, and the first covenant established, namely, at the time of Pentecost, as is commonly supposed by the Jewish doctors, and as may probably be collected from the text, *Exod. xix. 1.* I say, at that very time, the gospel, which contains the terms of the new covenant, began to be published from mount Sion, in as wonderful, though not so terrible a manner, as the law was given from mount Sinai. And thus it was foretold by the ancient prophets, (*Isaiah, ii. 3.* and *Micah, iv. 2.*) that *out of Sion should go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.*

I shall briefly explain the words, and as I pass along make some short observations upon them, and then fix upon that which is mainly intended in them, viz. this first and most miraculous gift of the Holy Ghost; which was conferred upon the apostles when they were assembled together at Jerusalem upon the day of Pentecost.

When the day of Pentecost was fully come; that is, when the fifty days after Easter were fulfilled, upon the fiftieth day, which was called *the day of Pentecost, they were all with one accord in one place.* They were all, that is, all the twelve apostles; for upon them it was that the gift of tongues was bestowed; because they were appointed to be the chief publishers of the gospel, having been eye-witnesses of our Saviour's miracles, and particularly of his resurrection from the dead. There is no

mention of any other in this chapter, but only of the twelve apostles; ver. 14. we find *Peter and the eleven* spoken of; and ver. 37. *it is said that the multitude, who were astonished at this miracle, spake to Peter and the rest of the apostles.*

They were all with one accord in one place. Unity is an excellent qualification and disposition for the Holy Spirit of God and his gifts; for which reason, the peace and good agreement of Christians is called by St. Paul, *the unity of the Spirit, in the bond of peace.* When the apostles were of *one heart, and one mind*, then the Holy Spirit of God came down upon them in this wonderful manner.

Ver. 2. *And suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind.* As they were together waiting for the promise of the Father, all on the sudden there came a sound, as of a strong gust of wind. This was a fit emblem of the Divine Spirit; for to this our Saviour had compared it, in his discourse with Nicodemus. *The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof; but canst not tell whence it cometh, nor whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit.* (*John, iii. 8.*)

As of a rushing mighty wind. To signify to us, that the publication of the gospel was attended with the same divine presence and power, that the giving of the law was; but not with the same circumstances of terror, which the apostle to the Hebrews describes, when he sets forth to us the difference between mount Sinai and mount Sion, that is, between the two dispensations of *the law and the gospel.* (*Heb. xii. 18, 19.*) Speaking of mount Sinai, from which the law was given, *ye are not come, says he, unto the mount, that might be touched, and that burned with fire, nor unto blackness, and darkness, and tempest, and the sound of a trumpet, and the voice of words; that is, that terrible voice of God, wherein the ten words of the law were delivered; which voice then shook the earth, as the apostle tells us, ver. 26. A voice so terrible, that they who heard it, earnestly begged that they might hear it no more.* These were all circumstances of great horror: but at the coming down of the Holy Ghost, here was no trumpet nor terrifying voice, no thunder, nor darkness, nor tempest, only the sound, as it

were, of a strong gust of wind, as a sensible signification of a divine presence and power.

And it filled all the house where they were sitting. The whole house, to represent the world, which was to be filled with the sound of the gospel; according to that of the psalmist cited by St. Paul, (Rom. x. 18.) where speaking of the general publication of the gospel, *their sound*, says he, *went out into all the earth, and their words unto the end of the world.*

It filled all the house. This is that which, ver. 5. of this chapter, our Saviour calls *baptizing the apostles with the Holy Ghost*, so that they who sat in the house were as it were immersed in the Holy Ghost, as they who were baptized with water, were overwhelmed and covered all over with water, which is the proper notion of baptism.

Ver. 3. *And there appeared unto them cloven tongues, as it were of fire, and sat upon each of them. Cloven tongues,* to signify the diversity and distribution of them; this gift being imparted to every one of the apostles; for it is said that these tongues *sat upon each of them.*

Cloven tongues as it were of fire, to signify the penetrating virtue and efficacy of their preaching. And this is that which John the Baptist calls *baptizing with the Holy Ghost, and with fire*, meaning the descent of the Holy Ghost upon the apostles, in the form of fiery tongues; divided, to signify the diversity of them. At first men were all of one language; and the confusion and division of tongues was a curse and punishment upon them, and the cause of their dispersion through the world; but now, God by the gift of several tongues designed to gather mankind together, and to unite them in one religion.

And it sat upon each of them. These *cloven fiery tongues sat upon each of the apostles*, that is, remained visibly upon them for some time; to signify the permanency of this gift of tongues. It was not like several of the other miraculous gifts, which did not constantly reside upon them; for they had them not at all times, nor when they pleased, but as God was pleased to dispense and communicate them: but this gift of tongues was constant, because they had continual use of it; and it was common to all the apostles,

because they were to be the publishers of the gospel, and the witnesses of our Lord's resurrection, which was the great miracle whereby the gospel was to be confirmed.

Ver. 4. *And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance. And began to speak with other tongues:* the vulgar translation renders it, *variis linguis, with divers tongues*; that is, they spake several languages beside their own mother tongue, or as it is expressed in our Saviour's promise to the apostles, Mark, xvi. 17. *with new tongues. These signs,* says our Lord before his ascension, *shall follow them that believe; they shall speak with new tongues*; that is, they should all on the sudden speak languages which they had never learned, nor had any knowledge of before.

I know not who was the first author of that conceit, that the miracle was not in the speakers, but in the hearers; that is, the apostles spake in their own mother tongue (the Syriac) and the hearers of several nations heard them every one in their own language; which indeed must be acknowledged to be as great a miracle, or greater, than if the apostles had spoken so many different languages: but this seems to be a very groundless and unreasonable conceit, and very contrary to the relation of this miraculous gift, and to all the circumstances of it. For the text expressly says, that they spake with other tongues, that is, in languages different from their mother tongue, in which they spake before, otherwise they could not be called *other, or new tongues*. And 1 Cor. xii. 28. the apostle, among the several gifts which God had bestowed upon the church, mentions *diversity of tongues*, which had not been true, if the apostles had all spoken in one language. And ver. 30. he makes a difference between the gift of speaking several languages, and interpreting things spoken in divers tongues. *Do all, says he, speak with tongues? do all interpret?* But if what the apostles had spoken in one language, had been heard by those of several nations in their own language, there had been no need of interpretation. And chap. xiv. ver. 2. *He that speaketh in an unknown tongue, speaketh not unto men, but unto God, for no man heareth him*; that is, no man under-

understandeth what he saith, God only knows it; whereas if they heard every one in their own language, they all understood what was said. And ver. 13. *Wherefore let him that speaketh in an unknown tongue, pray that he may interpret.* But what need of that, if every one heard what was spoken in his own tongue? And ver. 16. the apostle says, that *he that was unlearned, could not say Amen at giving of thanks in an unknown tongue; because he understood not what was said.* And ver. 27. *If any man speak in an unknown tongue, let it be by two, or at most by three, and that by course, and let one interpret.* All which plainly contradicts that foolish conceit, that the miracle of the gift of tongues was not in the speakers, but the hearers.

That which seems to have given occasion to this error, was, that they could not understand how any man should at the same time speak divers languages: but there is no ground at all to suppose so; because it is not said, that any of the apostles did at the same time speak several languages, (which is impossible,) but that the apostles spake several languages, so that the several nations then present heard some or other of the apostles speaking in their own language. So that to trouble ourselves no farther about this idle conceit, the miracle was not, that every one of the apostles did speak several languages at the same time; but that they all spake on a sudden languages which they had never learned before; so that the people of several nations, that were then present, did then hear some or other of the apostles speaking to them in their own language.

Having thus explained the several expressions and passages in the text,

I come now to speak to the main argument contained in them, viz. this miraculous gift which was conferred on the apostles, of speaking all on the sudden the languages of all nations, with whom they had occasion to converse, though they had never learned them before.

And in the handling of this argument, these following particulars will be fit to be considered, and inquired into by us.

First, the strangeness of this gift or miracle.

Secondly, the clear evidence of this miracle, that it was real, and that there was no manner of imposture or deceit in it, nor could there be any suspicion of it.

Thirdly, the wonderful effect of it immediately, and upon the spot, upon the very day, and in the place where it was first wrought.

Fourthly, the great necessity and usefulness of it.

Fifthly, the reason why it was the first of all the miraculous gifts, and so visibly conferred upon the apostles, before any of the rest.

Sixthly and lastly, I shall inquire, whether there be any necessity now, and consequently any probability of the renewing of this miracle, in order to the conversion of the infidel world, and those many and great nations in the remoter parts of the world which do still continue strangers and enemies to the Christian religion.

First, the strangeness of this gift or miracle. It was of that nature, that the like was never known in the world, neither before nor since the first ages of Christianity, upon any occasion whatsoever; nor can we well imagine any other sort of miracle that could probably affect men more, and strike them with greater wonder and admiration, and have been a more sensible demonstration of a divine power and presence accompanying the apostles, than to see and hear them all on the sudden perfectly to speak so many languages, which they had never learned before.

Especially if all the circumstances of the thing be duly weighed and considered; that they who pretended to be endowed with this gift, were not strangers newly arrived and come to Jerusalem, who before they came thither might possibly by great study and pains have attained to the knowledge and skill of several languages, (each of them suppose two languages apiece,) and have craftily combined together to impose upon the world, by the pretence and ostentation of such a miracle: but these persons were known to all that dwelt in Jerusalem, and had for a long time been taken notice of as the disciples and followers of Jesus, who was lately crucified among them; their education was known, and the meanness of their condition, that they were simple and illiterate persons, who never had the advantage or opportunity of attaining to this skill in an ordinary way; and therefore it must be concluded to have been an extraordinary and supernatural gift.

Beside,

Beside, that this miracle was very publicly wrought, and the noise of it in a few hours drew together the strangers of several nations, who being become proselytes of the Jewish religion, dwelt at Jerusalem; these all coming together, upon the noise and fame of this miracle, found it to be true, and as appears from the history, were so well satisfied of the reality of it, that a very great number, upon the occasion of it, and upon that very day, became proselytes to the Christian religion, and joined themselves to the apostles and their followers, (who were then but few in number,) and were presently admitted into the Christian church by baptism, the usual ceremony of admitting proselytes among the Jews. This was a present and great effect, and is a great evidence and confirmation of the truth and reality of the thing: but this I shall have occasion to speak more fully to, when I come to the fifth particular which I proposed.

I add farther, that our Saviour seems to have reckoned this as one of the greatest of miracles, and therefore to have reserved it for an instance and demonstration of the glorious power which he was invested withal, after his ascension into heaven; as may very probably be collected from that declaration and promise which he made to his apostles, a little before his departure from them: *Verily, verily, I say unto you, he that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also, and greater works than these shall he do, because I go unto my Father*; that is, in order to the sending the Holy Ghost, to endow them with power from on high (John, xiv. 12.), to qualify them for the publishing of the gospel, which they were forbidden to enter upon till this promise was made good to them. But what were these *greater works*, which he here promiseth to enable them to do, after he was gone to his Father? for he expressly promiseth, that they should not only do *the works which he had done, but greater works than those*: and what could these be? Our Saviour had wrought many and great miracles almost in all kinds imaginable; he had cast out devils, and healed all sorts of infirmities and diseases; he had changed nature, by turning water into wine, and had stopped the course of it, by stilling the winds and the sea by his word; and he had raised the dead; and now what

work could that be which was *greater* than any of these? Even that which I am speaking of, the miraculous power of speaking all languages, without learning them; a thing never heard of in the world before. And this was the first sensible effect of the coming of the Holy Ghost upon them, the first miraculous power with which he endowed his apostles, after he was ascended into heaven, and gone to his Father: an evident testimony of the glory and power which he was invested withal, after he was taken up into heaven, and sat down at the right hand of God, to signify both the honour and power which was conferred upon him, in that he enabled his apostles when he was absent from them, to do that, which whilst he was present with them, he had never enabled them to do, nor ever did himself; all which tends to advance this miracle, and to shew the greatness and strangeness of it above any other. And unless we fix it upon this miracle, it will be hard, if not impossible, to give a good account of the accomplishing of that solemn promise of our Saviour to his disciples, after he should be gone to his Father, that is, after his ascension into heaven. *Verily, verily, I say unto you, he that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also, and greater works than these shall he do, because I go unto my Father*. Now what miraculous work can be instanced in, that was done by the apostles, and was greater than any our Saviour did, when he was upon earth, but this only of speaking all languages, on the sudden, without ever having learned them? which consideration alone does confirm me past all doubt, that our Saviour in this promise meant the miraculous gift of tongues, which was the first gift that was conferred upon them, after he was ascended into heaven, and gone to his Father. I proceed,

Secondly, to consider the clear evidence of this miracle, that it was real, and that there could be no suspicion of any manner of imposture and deceit in it.

It was publicly wrought before many witnesses, and those the most competent of all other, because they were highly prejudiced against the apostles, and great enemies to them, as being the disciples of him whom they had so lately crucified as an impostor. They gave clear proof of this miraculous power in the presence of

great multitudes of several nations, who heard them every one speaking to them in their own language: and beside the present demonstration of this miraculous gift, to those of several nations that dwelt at Jerusalem, they gave evidence of it in all places and nations whither they went preaching the gospel; so that this miracle accompanied and continued with them, till the gospel was made known to a great part of the then known world, and lasted for a whole age, and till there was no farther need and use of it.

But it may be said, that though this was sufficiently evident to them that dwelt at Jerusalem, who knew the apostles, and the circumstances of their education; yet it was not so credible to others, who lived remote from Jerusalem, and neither knew the apostles, nor the manner of their education, nor were witnesses of the miraculous rise and beginning of this gift of tongues. These could only hear them speak in their language; but whether their knowledge of this language had been acquired by study, or was supernatural and infused, for this they had only common fame, and the apostles own word, which may seem to have been but a slender evidence for a thing so strange. And so it must be acknowledged to be, if the apostles affirmation, that this gift was supernaturally conferred upon them, had not been otherwise countenanced and supported; as it was in a very extraordinary and remarkable manner, by their being endowed with a power to work other miracles of all kinds, which they did every where, and very frequently upon all occasions. And this was sufficient to give credit to what they affirmed, concerning this supernatural gift of tongues: for when they saw them work other miracles of all sorts, they had no reason to doubt of the truth and reality of this miraculous gift of tongues, which was abundantly confirmed by the other miraculous powers with which they were endowed. So that the gospel, wherever it came, carried its own evidence along with it, and was confirmed by the very manner of its conveyance and delivery; and well might men entertain it as a divine doctrine, when the very manner and means, whereby it was conveyed to the world, was so strange and astonishing a miracle as was never wrought in the world before, upon any occasion whatso-

ever. And this will yet be farther evident, if we consider in the

Third place, the wonderful effect which this miracle immediately had upon the spot, and on the very day when it first appeared.

It had so glaring an evidence, and carried such conviction in it, that the doctrine which they who were endowed with miraculous gifts did preach, was immediately received and entertained by a very great number of the hearers; who, upon the conviction of this great miracle, became proselytes to this new religion, and were solemnly admitted to the profession of it by baptism; as we read, ver. 41. of this chapter; where after St. Peter had made an end of his sermon to the people upon this occasion, it is said, *then they that gladly received his word were baptized; and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls.* Here was a mighty effect, *three thousand* converted at one sermon, being convinced by the evidence of this miracle. And it was a very immediate effect; for it is said, that *the same day three thousand were added to the church.* Here was an effect proportionable to the greatness and strangeness of its cause; a mighty victory gained over the prejudices of men, and the powers of darkness, by the light and conviction of this miracle, which our Saviour seems to have kept in reserve for this great occasion, when the gospel and religion was to be first published, and to make its solemn entrance into the world. Here was a large portion of first-fruits, and a great earnest of that spiritual harvest, which the apostles had begun to reap; of which the first-fruits among the Jews were a type: for their harvest also was at this very season of the year; as I noted before.

Fourthly, we will consider the great usefulness of this miraculous gift, for the more easy and speedy conveyance of the doctrine of Christianity, and the diffusing and spreading the knowledge of it in the world; and this, if we consider it, not as a miracle, but only as a means so very convenient to this purpose, that by the advantage of it, the gospel made a greater progress in the space of a few years, than in human probability could have been made without it in many ages; and it was spread farther in thirty years, than could in reason have been expected in fif-

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teen hundred, by natural and ordinary means. *So mightily grew the word of God, and prevailed*; being carried on in so powerful and supernatural a manner.

Fifthly, we will consider, why this was the first miraculous gift, conferred upon the apostles more visibly, and before any of the rest. The other miraculous powers were only visible in their effects; but this was visible, not only in the effects of it, but likewise in the cause and in the manner of its being conferred: *for the Holy Spirit rested upon them, in the form of fiery cloven tongues*; to signify not only the diversity of languages which they should be enabled to speak, but the quick and piercing efficacy of their speech. The reason of all which seems to be, because this was the greatest of all miracles, and therefore fit to be first: for, as I shewed before, this, in the judgment of our Saviour, (who best understood the different degrees of miracles,) was greater than any of those which he himself in his life-time had wrought; and likewise, because this miracle was of greater use than any of the rest, and more necessary to the effectual discharge of their apostolical office, and to the easy success and more speedy effect of it. For by this miraculous gift more especially, the apostles were, as it were, consecrated to their office, and made capable to discharge it with ease and effect; their office being to publish the doctrine of the gospel to the world, and to be witnesses of our Saviour's resurrection from the dead, which was to be the great confirmation of his doctrine; neither of which they could, with any probability of effect and success, have done without this miraculous gift: for what slow progress must they have made, and how little could they have advanced in this work, had they either done all by interpreters, or been put to have learned the languages of the several nations to which they had been to preach, before they could have published this doctrine among them?

The Jews, who were very zealous of their religion, (which was likewise from God, and was attested by miracles,) upon occasion of several calamities which befel them, and carried them into captivity, were dispersed in several nations; and yet how slowly, for want of this gift, did they gain proselytes to their religion?

and how few did they convert to it in the space of four or five hundred years? by which we may judge how little Christianity would have gained upon the world, had it not been countenanced and assisted from heaven in this miraculous manner, I come now to the

Sixth and last thing which I proposed to inquire into; namely, whether there be any necessity now, and consequently probability of the renewing this miracle, in order to the conversion of infidels, and the gaining over of those many and great nations in the remoter parts of the world, who are still strangers and enemies to the Christian religion.

That which would induce a man to hope well in this case, is, that without some such miraculous gift, there is little or no probability of the conversion of infidel nations; unless God should be pleased, by some unexpected means, to bring over to Christianity some powerful prince of great reputation for his wisdom and virtue; who by the influence of his example, and by his favour and countenance, might give advantages to the planting of it among his subjects. And yet considering the inveterate and violent prejudices of men against a new religion, such an attempt would, in all human probability, be more likely to end in the ruin of the prince, and the overturning of his government, than in the establishment of a new religion. Of which kind there have been several instances very remarkable in Japan and Æthiopia, and perhaps in places and times nearer to us, and within our own memory.

But if any such thing should be attempted by private persons, the undertaking would meet with such insuperable obstacles, not only from the prejudices and interests of men, but from the great difficulty of gaining languages so different from our own, that it must in all likelihood have a very slow progress, and at last fall to the ground, for want of proper and effectual means to carry it on. For though the morality of the Christian religion be admirable, and very apt to recommend itself to the unbiassed and impartial reason of mankind (if any such thing were any where to be found); yet the death of the Son of God is such a stumbling-block, as it is very hard for human reason to get over. Of which the

Jesuits

Jesuits in China were so sensible, that according to their usual sincerity, they thought best to conceal that most essential part of the Christian doctrine, which relates to the death and sufferings of our Saviour. So I am sure St. Paul took it to be, when he tells the Corinthians, that *he determined to know nothing among them, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified.* This it seems he looked upon as the most material and valuable part of the Christian religion, and of greatest consequence to be known by us. But the Jesuits it seems thought otherwise, and therefore concealed it from their converts. For which most shameful and unchristian practice, several of them were very lately under prosecution at Rome.

Beside all this, the matters of fact upon which the truth of Christianity does necessarily depend, as the birth, and life, and miracles, and death, and resurrection of our Blessed Saviour, and his visible ascension into heaven; I say, these matters of fact, though we have a most credible history and relation of them brought down to us, do not carry so strong and sensible a conviction in them, to those who never heard of them before, as to be able to conquer and bear down a violent prejudice; nor is it in reason to be expected, that these things should easily be admitted by those who are utter strangers to our history of former times, and consequently not fit to judge of what value they are.

I speak not this to discourage any from using their best endeavours to propagate our religion among infidels, where the providence of God opens a door, and gives any opportunity for it. Among the many bad things that have been done in the church of Rome, there is one thing very much to their honour, that they have been at very great charge and pains in their missions for the conversion of infidel nations, especially in the eastern parts of the world, to that which they account the true Christian religion. And if the matter had been as honestly managed, as I hope it was piously intend-

ed, and their charity and zeal had been equally warm for the conversion of the northern infidels, where there is nothing to be met with but frost and cold, as it hath been for the conversion of those parts of the world, where gold and spices abound, it had deserved great praise, notwithstanding their mistakes in religion, and the great mixture of errors and corruptions in it.

And it is no small reproach to the protestant religion, that there hath not appeared an equal zeal among us for this purpose; and that to our unwearied endeavours to promote the interest of trade in foreign parts, there hath not been joined a like zeal and industry for the propagating of the Christian religion; which might surely be attempted, with more than ordinary advantage, in those places where we have so free a commerce.

It is not good for men to be confident, where they are not certain; but it seems to me not impossible, if the conversion of infidels to Christianity were sincerely and vigorously attempted by men of honest minds, who would make it their business to instruct those who are strangers to our religion in the pure doctrine of Christianity, free from all human mixtures and corruptions: it seems to me in this case, not at all improbable, that God would extraordinarily countenance such an attempt, by all fitting assistance, as he did the first publication of the gospel: for as the wisdom of God is not wont to do that which is superfluous, so neither is it wanting in that which is necessary. And from what hath been said upon this argument, the necessity seems to be much the same that it was at first.

I would not be mistaken in what I have said about this matter; I do not deliver it as positive, but only as probable divinity, nowise contrary to scripture, and very agreeable to reason.

Thus much may suffice to have spoken concerning this miraculous gift of tongues, conferred upon the apostles at the time of Pentecost.

S E R M O N XCIV.

By WILLIAM TILLY, D. D. Fellow
of Corpus Christi College.

[Preached before the University of Oxford.]

On Whit-Sunday.

EPHESIANS, iv. 30.

And grieve not the Holy Spirit of God, whereby ye
are sealed unto the day of redemption.

THERE can be no point of greater necessity, when we once come to have right apprehensions of the nature of the Holy Ghost, and are duly convinced of his mission and operations in the church of Christ, than to consider with what temper of our souls we must go on to entertain his divine presence, so as not either to drive him from us, or disappoint his sacred residence with us, of the gracious ends to which it was designed. For all the great things which we either believe or can speak concerning him are referred to our practice as their proper end, and it is there they must all terminate, as in their full and ultimate resolution: inasmuch as God does not require our belief and acknowledgment of this mystery of our faith, to amuse our understandings, or to engage us in nice and subtle speculations, but in order to the better conduct and regulation of our lives.

I have pitched upon these words of the apostle, as containing the most serious and affectionate application to this purpose. *Grieve not the Holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed to the day of redemption.*

By the appellation of Holy applied to the Spirit of God in my text, and other places of the scripture, we are not to understand only his absolute holiness, as he is considered in his own nature, but with a peculiar relation to ourselves; as he is likewise effectually holy, a principle productive of holiness in the members of his church; the great spring and fountain from whence are derived all that grace and virtue, by which the stains of our corrupt nature are cleansed, and by which we are endued with those divine qualities, and that heavenly disposition of mind, whereby we come to resemble God himself in his perfections, and are enabled to conform our actions to his will.

And when we reflect upon the infinite

benefits the Holy Spirit communicates to us of this nature, we shall quickly discern the mighty reason the apostle had to deliver so very strict and solemn a charge to the Ephesians on this occasion; and the strong obligation that lies upon us all to consider it well.

Which that we may be the better able to do, I shall in the first place make it my business to inquire under what notion, and for what reasons, the Holy Spirit of God is here represented by the apostle as grieved at the sins of men.

Secondly, I shall consider by what particular kinds and degrees of sin he is more especially grieved.

And, thirdly, I shall endeavour to explain the force, and shew the propriety, of the apostle's argument against our thus grieving him, because we are *sealed by him to the day of redemption.*

And, first, I am to inquire under what notion, and for what reasons, the Holy Spirit of God is here represented by the apostle as grieved at the sins of men. For here, in the very entrance on this argument, I am very sensible of a secret objection that will arise, and meet me. How can God be grieved? Is there passion in the Most High? Is he liable to change and alteration? And if not, with what propriety, or even tolerable sense of words, can we apply to the Holy Spirit an affection, and that of grief too, one of the most troublesome in our nature, a great instance of our present imperfection, and one of the main instruments of our misery? Can he be touched with our infirmities? Can there be weakness in the Almighty? or can grief spring up in the very fountain of joy itself? To which we must answer, that it is sure there cannot, according to the general and ordinary sense of human passions. And therefore, when the holy scriptures apply these expressions to almighty God, we must take care so to qualify the sense of them, as neither to charge his nature with imperfections on the one hand, nor his holy word with insincerity on the other.

Which inconveniencies we may easily avoid this way, by resolving with ourselves, that though there is not any thing of what we properly call passion in the divine nature, yet there is something of a superior and infinitely transcending kind, namely, the most strong and vigorous

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rous resentments of good or evil in his will, which he can no more suspend or interrupt than he can his very being. For we must take care of the chilling influence of a cold sort of philosophy, which, while it pretends to exempt almighty God from human passions, really deprives him of the proper perfections of his nature, and leaves him an indifferent and unactive being; than which nothing can be a greater derogation from his honour.

For these propensities and inclinations of God's will, though they are more intense and vigorous in themselves, than can be conceived by human thought, and answer to the utmost force, and all the ends of human passions; yet do they not partake of the nature of our passions, for these two reasons: first, because they are the motions of God's will immediately, and cannot reside in any sensitive appetite, (which is the proper seat of human passions,) inasmuch as God's pure and simple nature admits of no composition whatsoever, much less of a material one. And, secondly, because these motions never fluctuate in the least, never rise or fall, ebb or flow, but are standing and regular, coeternal with his nature, and so not liable to the contingencies of time, or the variety of outward accidents.

And so far as grief is a disposition in God's will, and the result of those two original resentments in the divine nature, of that eternal love to the persons of men, as they are his creatures, and of that infinite and irreconcilable abhorrence and detestation of their sins, which are the only hindrance of their happiness; so far, and in this sense, I apprehend it applicable to the Holy Spirit of God, in these words of the apostle.

But then we must take care again to understand this so, as that this resentment may be without any diminution or disturbance to God's happiness; for that we know is entirely secure, and founded within himself only; and the reason why grief, even in human passions, is attended with molestation, if we consider rightly, is not from the very passion itself, but from a secret reflection that goes along with it, that what is now the object of our sorrow does or may some way or other affect our well-being. But this we are sure can have no place in God Almighty, who is a self-sufficient and infinitely perfect being.

The Spirit of God therefore is in this sense said to be grieved for the sins of men, because of his infinite and most tender love to our persons, and at the same time his eternal hatred and displeasure at our sins. And the reasons why this expression of his being grieved is peculiarly applied to him, are these that follow:

First, Because upon the account of his more immediate presence with us, and of that nearness of relation which he is pleased to take upon himself toward us, our sins are now become more directly odious and offensive to him.

Secondly, Because we now commit them in contempt of the highest acts, and utmost expressions of infinite love; and cross and disappoint the Holy Spirit of God in his last remedy, whereby he is pleased to undertake for our recovery.

And, thirdly, and as a result and consequence from both the former considerations, because by thus ungratefully dealing with him, we provoke him to withdraw himself from us, and all the communications of his goodness with him.

And, first, we are said to grieve the Holy Spirit, because, upon the account of his more immediate presence with us, and of the nearness of that relation which he is pleased to take upon himself toward us, our sins are now become more highly odious and offensive to him, as being committed more directly under his eye, and with circumstances of the greatest irreverence toward him. He is pleased, we know, to look upon Christians as his own property, and as peculiarly separated to his honour from the whole bulk of mankind: *our bodies are his temples*; and by virtue of our mystical union with him being joined to the Lord, *we become one spirit* (1 Cor. vi. 17.), as the apostle in the highest and noblest strain of divine eloquence expresses himself. By reason of which so very strict an alliance, every sin we now commit, beside its original and natural turpitude, carries in it a fresh and necessary guilt and provocation. *Know ye not* (says St. Paul) *that your bodies are the temples of the Holy Ghost?* (1 Cor. vi. 19.) And how are they so? but by the inhabitation and intimate presence of this divine person within our hearts.

And therefore when we set up the idols of our own foolish lusts and passions in our heart, which is properly his altar, and bow

bow down ourselves, and serve those vicious inclinations, which we ought to sacrifice in obedience to his will, this must needs be in the highest degree grievous and offensive to him, as being indeed the deepest violation of his honour. For *what concord is there between the Holy Spirit and Belial? or what agreement hath the temple of God with idols?* (2 Cor. vi. 16.)

The Holy Ghost indeed has obliged himself, by virtue of his being our blessed Saviour's advocate here on earth, to come and abide with us, and not entirely to give us up, and leave us to ourselves, till he sees we will no longer hear his reproof, and are desperately lost to all his counsels. So that we see he has in some measure confined himself to us, and it is by that means become a great deal more in our power to offend and grieve him, in that he has undertaken not to desert us presently, but for a while to strive with our ingratitude: and this, if any thing, should prove an argument upon our ingenuity not to offend him, by taking in his worst enemies, our sins and pollutions, into his awful presence. And if yet we will do so, if we shall treat the Holy Spirit of God with such contempt and insolence, as to provide no better company for him than our bestial inclinations, and vilest lusts, how much must the influence, think we, of such a base unworthy neighbourhood afflict him!

Again, secondly, we grieve the Holy Spirit of God by our sins, because they are now committed in contempt of the highest and last expressions of infinite love; and we thereby cross and disappoint the Holy Spirit in his last remedy, whereby he is pleased to undertake for our recovery. And thus every sin we are now guilty of is in some measure a sin against the Holy Ghost, (though not that peculiarly great and irremissible one,) as being acted in despite of all his powerful assistances, in defiance of all his rebukes, and by way of the most ungracious return for infinite kindness.

For under Christ himself, the Holy Spirit is now the great solicitor and mediator with mankind in God's behalf: and though the malice of all our sins in the last result strikes farther, and rebounds upon the blessed Father and the Son; yet considering that the Holy Ghost is the immediate minister of God's

will on earth, and transacts all the great affairs in the church of Christ, quickening and enlivening the whole; on this account, I say, our sins are now directly aimed at him, and would seem to cast the greatest blemish and reflection on his honour; as if he were not faithful to this great house of God, and did not supply his servants with that sufficiency of spiritual assistance, which is necessary to answer the great end and design of his mission and office of mediation with mankind.

So that whilst he pours out all the riches of his grace and love upon us, and finds them all unsuccessful, and no other returns from us but such as we ought to be ashamed to make him, no wonder then if he begin to enter his complaint against us, in the language of the prophet, and appeal to all the world for our ungrateful behaviour: *And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem and men of Judah, judge I pray you betwixt me and my vineyard: what could have been done to my vineyard that I have not done in it? wherefore, when I looked it should bring forth grapes, brought it forth wild grapes?* (Isa. v. 3, 4.) These and many more such expostulations, which we meet with in the holy scriptures, are the expressions of grief and concern; such as imply the utmost unwillingness to deal severely even by those, whom yet by all the wise methods of his goodness he could not reform. The Holy Spirit of God here represents himself as one who would be glad to spare sinners, if he could, and therefore we may be sure it is grievous to him that by their sins they will not suffer him.

And for men thus to disappoint the Holy Spirit of love, for that is his peculiar title as well as nature, to make him thus wait that he may be gracious (Isa. xxx. 18.), and pay attendance on us, through the tedious stages of our folly and vanity; and to stand by, and be a witness of our despite and disobedience against himself, with the importunate offers of infinite kindness in his hand; is a practice of that nature, that what man is there of any tenderness or ingenuity in his soul, who can bear the harshness of such an ungrateful reflection as this? It is an argument of God's infinite mercy, that he is pleased only to express himself as grieved at such impiety and baseness, that his anger does

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not smoke, and his indignation flame out against such sinners, and he consume them in a moment.

But behold, instead of this; *O the height and depth of the patience and long-suffering of God!* because we have given him so many promises that he should expect better things from us, and he has given us so many powerful motives and reasons why he might, after all his resentments of our contumelies against him, come out to us under the milder style of grief only; not to consume us for our treacherous baseness, but to convince us of it, and to persuade us from it! *Who can express the loving kindness of the Lord, or shew forth all his praise! How unsearchable are his mercies, and his love past finding out!* But let us take care we do not always thus provoke him, and slight his patience.

It was the base proceeding of the Jewish nation to affront and grieve him, after innumerable experiences of his exceeding mercies toward them, even almost to a degree of fondness, that made infinite love at last turn into bitterness and afflict them: as we find the account described in the holy prophet in the most affectionate and lively manner. And the reason at last given for God's afflicting that people, because after all his infinite love and tenderness toward them, they *rebelled and vexed his Holy Spirit, therefore he was turned to be their enemy, and he fought against them.* (Isa. lxiii.)

And surely, considering the much greater obligations he has laid upon all Christians, whom he has admitted into a state of the highest privileges, and most glorious expectations, we may conclude his resentments of our unworthy behaviour at last will be in proportion to the mercies we have received from his hands, and then, we are sure, they must be infinite.

There is no doubt but God observes and hates the sins of men, wheresoever they are found, and his *wrath abides on every worker of iniquity*, of what denomination soever, according to the measure of his sins; but it is the profane Christian that *emphatically grieves his Holy Spirit*, which expresses and implies a strange and peculiar degree of baseness in our sins, as well as the guilt of common disobedience; inasmuch as a man is said to be provoked indeed by the evil

turns of his enemy, and to hate him for them, but he is properly grieved at the offences of his friend. And therefore, beside the common and general obligations of duty that lie upon a Christian, the very nearness of relation that we bear to Almighty God, being his children and friends, should, one would think, be a most powerful restraint upon us from evil, and would be so, if we had any thing of that goodness and gratitude in our tempers, that we ought to have.

But if arguments of this nature do not carry force enough in them to keep us from grieving our best and most intimate friend and benefactor, the Holy Spirit of God, let us consider, in the third place, what our grieving of him farther implies, which is, that by this ungrateful dealing with him, we provoke him to remove and withdraw himself from us, and all the communications of his goodness with him.

Now though this seems rather the result and consequence of grief, than any thing of the formal notion of it, yet because in divinity, and when we speak of Almighty God, we are allowed to give the name of the internal disposition to the outward effect produced by it, upon that account the Holy Spirit of God is not improperly said to be grieved, when he deals with men in a way suitable to that of their dealing with one another, when under the force and influence of that passion. And we are very well acquainted how the act of grieving amongst men is apt to produce offence, regret, and distance: it being one of the first and most general instincts in our nature, not to associate and unite itself with what is so very disagreeable.

Now whether it is that our sins do by a sort of natural efficacy pollute and stain our souls, and so indispose them for the continued influences of the Holy Spirit, or whether upon our provocations he is pleased to restrain them by way of a judicial consequence, I need not here determine. This is certain, we may forfeit and diminish, and even lose this blessed influx of divine grace upon our minds; and it is to be hoped that we have all had such a lively sense, and such convictions of these heavenly operations within us, one time or other, as that, when we have been so unhappy as to offend God by our sins, we could easily

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perceive the change and alteration, that followed in our souls in that dryness, and desolation, and barrenness of spirit, which ensues more especially upon our commission of sins of a greater malignity and wilfulness.

For the common pollutions of our lives, the sins as they are called of daily incursion, are such as, by the weakness of our present nature, it is impossible for us wholly to avoid. And therefore the Holy Spirit of God, in these cases, is not pleased to take the forfeiture; but notwithstanding the little films of corruption which these sins cast about us, he still continues to stream out upon our hearts with so vigorous a light from heaven, that no bad influence of this nature can intercept or stifle him, but is daily dissolved and dissipated by his vigorous rays; as an early cloud and morning dew, by the heat of the sun. But then, when our omissions or commissions grow notorious, when our neglect of spiritual improvements runs on, and leaves upon our mind an indisposition to our duty, or when we commit sins with a high hand, with degrees of malice and defiance to God's will and law, our guilty mind then dares not for some time look toward him. *The Blessed Spirit goes and returns to his place* (Hosea, v. 15.); he retires and hides himself from us, till we seek him again with sorrow, and recover the light of his favour by our repentance.

And the more frequently we commit sins of this nature and degree of aggravation, so in proportion we still weaken the influences of God's grace and spirit to ourselves; and though he may indeed forgive us for what is past, as he very frequently does, and be reconciled as to the final issues of our repentance, yet such frequent breaches as these will necessarily bring on some estrangement between him and us at present, and our intercourse can never be so cordial, when it is interrupted by such often repeated offences. A man, in like manner, will forgive his friend a great many slips and imprudencies, and some wilful transgressions; but to find him frequently affronting him, in the same or greater instances, after all the kindness of admonition too, must necessarily wear off and abate by degrees the firmness of his affection, even to the person that had once the greatest

interest in his heart: because he cannot but conclude, that such a one does not any longer either desire, or deserve to maintain a friendly correspondence with him.

And thus having shewn what is meant by grieving the Holy Spirit, and for what reasons he is more peculiarly said to be grieved by the sins of Christians; I come now in the second place to consider, by what particular kinds and degrees of sins we may be in a greater measure said to grieve him. And these sins we may in the general resolve to be such as either at first do totally defeat or disappoint his holy influences of their due force and energy upon our hearts; or come afterward to be in the most downwrought opposition to his light and divine assistances. Of the former sort I shall mention only, and that will be sufficient, an habitual inconsideration and inadvertency of mind to the sacred motions and inspirations of the Holy Spirit; and of the latter, sins of presumption in general, with those particular kinds of them, sensuality, malice, and spiritual pride; against which the Holy Ghost declares himself to bear the most irreconcilable aversion; because these are indeed the most destructive of his great work of sanctification, which it is the will of God, and his own chief design, to carry on in the world, for the benefit and happiness of men's souls.

The first thing I shall mention, as being more especially grievous to the Holy Spirit, is an habitual inconsideration and inadvertence of his holy motions within us. There is a certain peculiar frame and temper of soul required, a sobriety of mind, without which the Spirit of God cannot or will not concur to the purification of our corrupt nature; and which it is in our own power, by virtue of his general preventing grace, to form and prepare within ourselves; and he expects we should do so, it being the ground and foundation upon which he is to proceed with in his after-workings. Now this consists in preserving our minds in a cool and serious disposition, in regulating and calming our affections, and calling in and checking the inordinate pursuits of our passions after the vanities and pleasures of this world; which, that we should do indeed, is of such mighty consequence to our improvement in holiness, that if we

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inquire into the reasons of men's non-proficiency under the most powerful means of grace which God has given us, we shall find it to be chiefly from hence, that men do not look enough within themselves, they do not observe and watch the disorders and imperfections of their own spirits, nor attend with any care to those directions and remedies, that would be continually thrown up upon their thoughts from this fountain of life within them, if they were but serious and recollected enough to give them admittance. Men are generally lost in the hurry and distractions of life, in the business or pleasures of it, and seem to think that their regeneration, their new nature, will spring and grow up within them, with as little care and thought of their own, as the first rudiments of their bodies were formed within the *bowels of their mother*. (Psal. cxxi. 6.)

Whereas there is nothing more certain than that the Holy Spirit of God does not ordinarily co-operate to the reformation of our nature, but by taking into his concurrence our own thoughtfulness and careful attendance to his operations: which are generally lost upon us, whilst, in the prophet's language, we *scatter our ways* (Jer. iii. 13.), we squander and throw away our hearts upon varieties of folly that affect us, and leave that one thing needful, a due care of our spiritual improvements, quite neglected.

There is many a man, that, for the main of his life, is regular and orderly in his conversation, and generally observes the seasons of outward discipline, of fasting and prayer, with some care; who yet in the intervals of these duties gives so great a loose to his thoughts, and affections, and discourse, and seems to adourn the great business of his duty to the next hour of his devotion: whereas they are indeed these vacancies and intervals from his immediate attendance upon his duty, that are the great and proper opportunities of improvement; by observing himself, and comparing the gradual increases of his spiritual strength, and by stifling and subduing every irregular thought and motion that stirs within his breast. And if these persons, whom yet we may and must in equity and charity term good men, lose so much in their spiritual estate, for want of better adjusting and balancing their accounts; what

then must we think of others, who forfeit all, by scarce ever bestowing a serious thought upon themselves, and their own conduct in their lives? Surely there is not any temper of mind less a friend to a spirit of religion, than a thoughtless, light, and inconsiderate one; that, by the continual succession and transport and hurry of vain affections, excludes every thing that is serious from an admission to the soul, and from leaving those impressions there, which should influence the life and outward actions. So that I could almost venture to say that a man were better be guilty of a single act of wilful sin, than to lie generally under this slumber of spirit, this supineness, this lethargy of soul: because the guilt of the former is so very open and importunate, that a man of any principles can have no rest in his spirit till he is in some hopeful way of recovery by an after repentance: whereas the latter perceives not its own danger, and so goes on without conviction; and the consequence quite defeats and frustrates all the blessed means of restoration. And if we measure the grief and concern of the Holy Spirit at the sins of men, from the degrees of his frustration and disappointment, we may conclude there is no state of mind, that he is less pleased with, unless it be that of an hardened, daring, presumptuous offender.

Which was the second sort and degree of sins that I am to consider as in the highest manner offensive to the Holy Spirit of God.

An inconsiderate inadvertent mind will not be at the pains to see the light, but a bold presumptuous sinner sees it clearly, and hates it, and tries to put it out. The former offends by his carelessness, the latter by direct hatred and opposition. Such a one is the professed enemy of God, comes up to a close engagement, and, as holy Job expresses it, runs *upon his neck, and upon the thick bosses of his buckler*. (Job, xv. 26.)

And herein lies the heinous guilt and aggravation of this sort of sins above those of ignorance and infirmity; that whereas these two suppose a defect, the one in the understanding, the other in the passions; the sin of presumption, in the mean time, includes in it all the malice of wilfulness and rebellion: when a man is not ignorant, and is not surprised, but

knowingly and resolutely goes against the express declarations of God's word, and the lively, full, and intimate convictions of his own mind and conscience. So that this is the very measure, and standard of iniquity, and all other sins, of what kind soever, take their several distinctions of more or less guilty from their nearer approach to, or greater distance from, sins of this nature and denomination: inasmuch as these imply the greatest opposition to God's will, contempt of his holiness, and defiance of his justice. *Because thou hast despised me*, was the black stile under which God by the prophet taxed the murder and adultery of David; as having no character worse than that, by which he could express so foul a revolt. And for us to condemn, and do despite to the Spirit of grace, which is the true interpretation of all sins of this quality, if any thing can do so, must surely grieve him, not only as to the inward resentment and disposition of his will toward such sinners, but as the utmost consequences of his outward dealing with them, his retiring from them, and forsaking them, in proportion to their guilt.

Other sins, that have yet some alloy in their nature, and somewhat to plead in their excuse, as sins of ignorance and infirmity, do yet in some measure weaken and diminish his gracious presence with us, and cast a cloud for a while upon the light of his favour toward us. But the ill consequence of these sins, through God's mercy, and our careful endeavours, may, if they are taken in time, be more easily repaired; inasmuch as our will, though under a bruise, in such a case, retains yet some disposition to the grace of God, as a newly extinguished taper does to light. But our acts of presumptuous sins, more especially if repeated, quite break off the staff of our spiritual strength, smother and extinguish the remains of life within us for a while, and leave us senseless and groveling in our own pollutions. And if we recover again, it is with pangs and convulsions of mind, and like the travail of a new birth, till another nature be formed within us.

This indeed is the condition and consequence of all presumptuous sins in general. But then there are some particular sins of this nature and distinction, that besides the formal notion of presumption,

which is common to them with the rest, do yet, by a more direct and malignant influence of their own, make havock of our spiritual estate, as they are presumptuous sins of such a particular kind and constitution. Such, for instance, as those I mentioned, sensuality, malice, and spiritual pride; which, that they do more especially grieve the Holy Spirit, we may be well assured, when we only remember that they are the blackest characters of a carnal mind, which we know is downright enmity with God himself; and because they directly oppose and contradict the Holy Ghost in those graces of purity, love, and humility, which he sets the highest value on himself, and which he most carefully endeavours to promote and advance in men's hearts, as the greatest instances of our holiness, and the main conditions of our happiness. But as I have not now time to take a more particular view of these, I shall leave the more thorough consideration of them therefore to your own thoughts; and proceed,

In the third and last place, to explain the force, and shew the propriety, of the apostle's argument against our grieving the Holy Spirit, because we *are sealed by him to the day of redemption*.

By the *day of redemption* may be meant in general the time of our entrance upon our eternal and unchangeable state of happiness in another world; whether at our leaving these bodies, in the hour of death, or our resuming them afterward at the general resurrection: though I should rather chuse to understand them in the latter of these senses, because we find the apostle uses the same term in another place, where we are certain he speaks of the resurrection in these words, *waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our bodies*. (Rom. viii. 23.) And it is to this *day of redemption* that we are consigned by the *seal of the Holy Spirit* these three ways:

First, In that by the efficacy of his grace we receive his real stamp and impress upon our souls, and are made *partakers of the divine nature*, and become meet and qualified for the enjoyment of *the inheritance of the saints in light*. (2 Pet. i. 4.)

Secondly, Because we receive him as a sign and mark of God's propriety in us, that we belong to Christ, and as a condi-

tion and security, by God's appointment, of our future happiness.

And, thirdly, We receive him as the earnest, and assurance to our own private spirits, that we have a title to eternal life and happiness, and shall not fail of it, if we persevere to do his will; because the *Spirit of God beareth witness with our spirit that we are the children of God.* (Rom. viii. 16.)

These are the most remarkable uses of a seal, and the chief relations that it bears; and though, by the help of a good invention and fancy, a man might possibly discover more, yet I believe they would be such only, as are involved in those I have already mentioned, or coincident with them. These however, that I have before described, I am sure are clearly expressed in, or plainly deducible from, the holy scriptures, and that shews them to be most pertinent to my present subject.

And, first, we are sealed by the Holy Spirit of God, in that by the power and efficacy of his grace we take a real stamp and impress from him upon our souls, being made partakers of the divine nature, and rendered meet and qualified for the inheritance of the saints in light. For this indeed is the main end of the Holy Spirit's dwelling with us, to rectify the disorderly motions of our souls, to heal our inward distempers, and to restore that image of himself upon our nature, which is so far lost by our original and actual corruptions. And truly, unless our spirits are in some measure thus reformed, and set right, and delivered from under those pollutions into which we are sunk, it is impossible there should be the least communion between him and us whatever: for our similitude to him is the only ground and foundation of our fellowship with him; for what *communion is there between light and darkness? And if we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth.* (1 John, i. 6.) So that it is only by the renewal of our minds that we are made after the *image of him that created us* (Col. iii. 10.); and thus by representing him in that image, we are still more susceptible of his influences, and by means of a friendly and daily intercourse with him, we are more and more transformed into his likeness, till we are satisfied with it.

Nor is this representation of his purity and holiness in ourselves required only as an arbitrary condition of our gracious correspondence with the Holy Spirit; but is absolutely necessary likewise in its nature, as a state and temper of soul really qualifying and disposing us for spiritual happiness. For if there should be no suitableness in nature and disposition between God and us, how is it possible then his happiness should be ours, if ours must consist, as it does, in the contemplation and love of his perfections? so that there does not appear the least ground of reason why some men should question, as they do, whether holiness of life, and purity of heart, be necessary not only as a stated condition, but as a natural qualification for our future happiness; if we allow only this one supposition, which surely is a very reasonable one, that a likeness and enjoyment must require a similitude of nature and inclination: which is a proposition that seems to me so very clear, as not to be capable of any proof more evident than itself.

But now, a conformity of will and affections to the will of God is what we mean, when we speak of holiness as it is in men; and to produce this is the proper end and design of the sanctifying influences of the Holy Spirit, and therein consists all the image and resemblance of him that we are represented as capable of in the holy scriptures: for, by his sacred presence with us, we are not more nearly united to his nature and being than we were before, but by virtue of that presence, we receive from him a more immediate virtue, and a greater fulness of heavenly influences. He communicates to us, and we derive from him, *grace for grace* (John, i. 16.); we take such characters and features of resemblance into our spirits, as correspond to the original patterns of holiness and perfection within himself; and thus we are sealed by him in the first sense, by way of preparation and order to the day of our redemption, the happiness he designs us in a future state.

And since we are so, and the new nature that is wrought within us grows up under the forming power of his hands; what do we, when we grieve him by our sins, but unravel and destroy his works, set him back in his designs, by breaking

down those piles and fences which he had been hitherto raising against the overflowings of our natural corruption; and so at last entirely defeat him in his gracious methods and counsels for our salvation?

Secondly, We are sealed by the Holy Spirit in order to our redemption, in that we receive him as a sign and mark of God's propriety in us that we belong to Christ, and as a condition and security, by the divine appointment, of our future happiness; since God is pleased to admit none for his children but those that have received the *spirit of his Son in their hearts*. And then, we are sure, *if we are not children, neither can we be heirs, either heirs with God, or joint-heirs with Christ* (Rom. viii. 17.); which is the strong reverse of the apostle's argument in his Epistle to the Romans.

But now, if the spirit of Christ dwell in us, by that we shall be known hereafter, and distinguished from others, as we are at present consigned over, in the most proper sense of that word, to our own redemption. For, as the apostle reasons in the same chapter, *If the spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his spirit that dwelleth in you*. (Rom. viii. 11.)

From hence then it appears that the Holy Spirit within us is the mark and character which God sets upon his servants, appropriating them to himself. And in whomsoever he finds it, when he comes to reckon with the world for their transgressions, he will pass over that man, and will not suffer the destroyer to come in and hurt him. I cannot better express this than in the language of the prophet Malachi to this very purpose of my text, where, speaking of those that feared God's name, he says, *And they shall be mine, saith the Lord, in the day when I make up my jewels; and I will spare them as a man spareth his own son that serveth him. In the day when I make up my jewels*, (Mal. iii. 7.) that is, when I set my seal and mark of appropriation, as Dr. Hammond very well observes in his Exposition on the very words of my text.

But now, if the Holy Spirit be thus the seal, the sign, and security of our salvation, then by grieving and provoking him by our sins, we break up this seal with our own hands, we cancel our firmest security, and, as much as in us lies, reverse our own title to eternal life. And I think nothing more than that either can or need be said, to convince us of the extreme danger and evil of such a practice.

Thirdly, and to conclude all, beside that the Holy Spirit within us is a firm security and condition in the nature of the thing itself, and, by God's appointment of our title to eternal life, he is likewise an earnest within our hearts, and a particular assurance to our own private spirits, that we shall not fail of our salvation, if we go on to please him; because *the Spirit of God bears witness with our spirits, that we are the children of God*. (Rom. viii. 16.)

And this inward testimony of our mind is very different from that outward one in his word, which latter may be eternally true, that he that has the spirit of God shall live for ever, and yet many a particular man may not have that assurance, and that immediate application of this general truth to himself: so that though this private testimony of our own mind proceed upon the ground, and is formed according to the direction of God's word without, yet that it shall be lively and effectual to our comfort, depends upon the secret operation of his spirit within: who, by infusing his heavenly consolations into our souls, by quickening and enlivening our drooping spirits, and giving us a high and spiritual gust and relish of his promises, raises bright and joyous resentments within us, and makes a man almost anticipate the bliss to which he is going. In this sense God is said by the apostle to the Corinthians to *have sealed us, and to have given the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts*. (2 Cor. i. 22.) And that earnest not only by way of confirmation of our title to happiness, but as an actual part of the reward itself at present, the fullness and completion of which we expect hereafter.

S E R M O N XCV.

By DEAN SWIFT.

On Trinity Sunday.

I JOHN, v. 7.

For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost; and these three are one.

THIS day being set apart to acknowledge our belief in the eternal Trinity, I thought it might be proper to employ my present discourse entirely upon that subject; and I hope to handle it in such a manner, that the most ignorant among you may return home better informed of your duty in this great point, than probably you are at present.

It must be confessed, that by the weakness and indiscretion of busy (or at best, of well-meaning) people, as well as by the malice of those who are enemies to all revealed religion, and are not content to possess their own infidelity in silence, without communicating it to the disturbance of mankind; I say, by these means, it must be confessed, that the doctrine of the Trinity hath suffered very much, and made Christianity suffer along with it. For these two things must be granted: first, that men of wicked lives would be very glad there were no truth in Christianity at all; and secondly, if they can pick out any one single article in the Christian religion which appears not agreeable to their own corrupted reason, or to the arguments of those bad people, who follow the trade of seducing others, they presently conclude that the truth of the whole gospel must sink along with that one article; which is just as wise as if a man should say, because he dislikes one law of his country, he will therefore observe no law at all; and yet that one law may be very reasonable in itself, although he does not allow it, or does not know the reason of the lawgivers.

Thus it hath happened with the great doctrine of the Trinity; which word is indeed not in scripture, but was a term of art invented in the earliest times to express the doctrine by a single word, for the sake of brevity and convenience. The doctrine then, as delivered in holy scripture, though not exactly in the same words, is very short, and amounts only

to this, that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, are each of them God, and yet that there is but one God. For, as to the word Person, when we say there are three persons; and as to those other explanations in the Athanasian Creed this day read to you, (whether compiled by Athanasius or no,) they were taken up three hundred years after Christ, to expound this doctrine; and I will tell you upon what occasion. About that time there sprang up a heresy of a people called Arrians, from one Arrius the leader of them. These denied our Saviour to be God, although they allowed all the rest of the gospel; (wherein they were more sincere than their followers among us.) Thus the Christian world was divided into two parts, till at length, by the zeal and courage of St. Athanasius, the Arrians were condemned in a general council, and a creed formed upon the true faith, as St. Athanasius hath settled it. This creed is now read at certain times in our churches, which although it is useful for edification to those who understand it, yet since it contains some nice and philosophical points which few people can comprehend, the bulk of mankind is obliged to believe no more than the scripture-doctrine, as I have delivered it; because that creed was intended only as an answer to the Arrians in their own way, who were very subtil disputers.

But this heresy having revived in the world about an hundred years ago, and continued ever since, not out of a zeal to truth, but to give a loose to wickedness, by throwing off all religion; several divines, in order to answer the cavils of those adversaries to truth and morality, began to find out farther explanations of this doctrine of the Trinity, by rules of philosophy; which have multiplied controversies to such a degree, as to beget scruples that have perplexed the minds of many sober Christians, who otherwise could never have entertained them.

I must therefore be so bold to affirm, that the method taken by many of those learned men to defend the doctrine of the Trinity, hath been founded upon a mistake.

It must be allowed, that every man is bound to follow the rules and directions of that measure of reason which God

hath given him; and indeed he cannot do otherwise if he will be sincerely or act like a man. For instance: If I should be commanded by an angel from heaven, to believe it is midnight at noon day, yet I could not believe him. So if I were directly told in scripture, that *three are one, and one is three*, I could not conceive or believe it in the natural common sense of that expression, but must suppose that something dark or mystical was meant, which it pleased God to conceal from me and from all the world. Thus in the text, *There are three that bear record, &c.* Am I capable of knowing and defining what union and what distinction there may be in the divine nature, which possibly may be hid from the angels themselves? Again, I see it plainly declared in scripture that there is but one God; and yet I find our Saviour claiming the prerogative of God in knowing men's thoughts; in saying *he and his Father are one*; and, *before Abraham was, I am*. I read, that the disciples worshipped him; that Thomas said to him, *My Lord and my God*. And St. John, chap. 1st, *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God*. I read likewise that the Holy Ghost bestowed the gift of tongues, and the power of working miracles, which, if rightly considered, is as great a miracle as any; that a number of illiterate men should of a sudden be qualified to speak all the languages then known in the world, such as could be done by the inspiration of God alone! From these several texts it is plain that God commands us to believe there is an union and there is a distinction; but what that union, or what that distinction is, all mankind are equally ignorant, and must continue so, at least till the day of judgment, without some new revelation.

But because I cannot conceive the nature of this union and distinction in the divine nature, am I therefore to reject them as absurd and impossible, as I would if any one told me that three men are one, and one man is three? We are told, that a man and his wife are one flesh; to this I can comprehend the meaning of; yet, literally taken, it is a thing impossible. But the apostle tells us, *We see but in part, and we know but in part*; and yet

we would comprehend all the secret ways and workings of God. Therefore I shall again repeat the doctrine of the Trinity, as it is positively affirmed in scripture; that God is there expressed in three different names, as Father, as Son, and as Holy Ghost; that each of these is God, and that there is but one God. But this union and distinction are a mystery utterly unknown to mankind.

This is enough for any good Christian to believe on this great article, without ever inquiring any farther. And this can be contrary to no man's reason, although the knowledge of it is hid from him.

But there is another difficulty of great importance among those who quarrel with the doctrine of the Trinity, as well as with several other articles of Christianity; which is, that our religion abounds in mysteries, and these they are so bold to revile as cant, imposture, and priestcraft. It is impossible for us to determine for what reasons God thought fit to communicate some things to us in part, and leave some part a mystery. But so it is in fact, and so the holy scriptures tell us in several places. For instance: the resurrection and change of our bodies are called mysteries by St. Paul; our Saviour's incarnation is another; the kingdom of God is called a mystery by our Saviour, to be only known to his disciples; so is faith and the word of God by St. Paul: I omit many others. So that to declare against all mysteries without distinction or exception, is to declare against the whole tenor of the New Testament.

There are two conditions that may bring a mystery under suspicion. First, when it is not taught and commanded in holy writ; or, secondly, when the mystery turns to the advantage of those who preach it to others. Now, as to the first, it can never be said, that we preach mysteries without warrant from holy scripture, although I confess this of the Trinity may have sometimes been explained by human invention, which might perhaps better have been spared. As to the second; it will not be possible to charge the protestant priesthood with proposing any temporal advantage to themselves by broaching or multiplying.

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or preaching of mysteries. Does this mystery of the Trinity, for instance, and the descent of the Holy Ghost, bring the least profit or power to the preachers? No, it is as great a mystery to themselves as it is to the meanest of their hearers: and may be rather a cause of humiliation, by putting their understanding in that point upon a level with the most ignorant of their flock. It is true indeed, the Roman church hath very much enriched herself by trading in mysteries, for which they have not the least authority from scripture, and were fitted only to advance their own temporal wealth and grandeur; such as transubstantiation, worshipping of images, indulgencies for sins, purgatory, and masses for the dead; with many more: but it is the perpetual talent of those who have ill-will to our church, or a contempt for all religion, taken up by the wickedness of their lives, to charge us with the errors and corruptions of popery, which all protestants have thrown off near two hundred years; whereas those mysteries held by us have no prospect of power, pomp, or wealth, but have been ever maintained by the universal body of true believers from the days of the apostles, and will be so to the resurrection; neither will the gates of hell prevail against them.

It may be thought, perhaps, a strange thing, that God should require us to believe mysteries, while the reason or manner of what we are to believe is above our comprehension, and wholly concealed from us: neither doth it appear at first sight, that the believing or not believing them doth concern either the glory of God, or contribute to the goodness or wickedness of our lives. But this is a great and dangerous mistake. We see what a mighty weight is laid upon faith, both in the Old and New Testament. In the former we read how the faith of Abraham is praised, who could believe that God would raise from him a great nation, at the very same time that he was commanded to sacrifice his only son, and despaired of any other issue. And this was to him a great mystery. Our Saviour is perpetually preaching faith to his disciples, or reproaching them with the want of it; and St. Paul produceth numerous examples of the wonders done by faith. And all this is highly reasonable;

for faith is an entire dependence upon the truth, the power, the justice, and the mercy of God; which dependence will certainly incline us to obey him in all things. So that the great excellency of faith consists in the consequence it hath upon our actions: as if we depend upon the truth and wisdom of a man, we shall certainly be more disposed to follow his advice. Therefore, let no man think that he can lead as good a moral life without faith, as with it; for this reason, because he who has no faith, cannot, by the strength of his own reason or endeavours, so easily resist temptations, as the other who depends upon God's assistance in the overcoming his frailties, and is sure to be rewarded for ever in heaven for his victory over them. *Faith*, says the apostle, *is the evidence of things not seen*. He means, that faith is a virtue by which any thing commanded us by God to believe, appears evident and certain to us, although we do not see, nor can conceive it; because, by faith we entirely depend upon the truth and power of God.

It is an old and true distinction, that things may be above our reason without being contrary to it. Of this kind are the power, the nature, and the universal presence of God, with innumerable other points. How little do those who quarrel with mysteries, know of the commonest actions of nature? The growth of an animal, of a plant, or of the smallest seed, is a mystery to the wisest among men. If an ignorant person were told that a loadstone would draw iron at a distance, he might say it was a thing contrary to his reason, and could not believe before he saw it with his eyes.

The manner whereby the soul and body are united, and how they are distinguished, is wholly unaccountable to us. We see but one part, and yet we know we consist of two; and this is a mystery we cannot comprehend any more than that of the Trinity.

From what hath been said, it is manifest, that God did never command us to believe, nor his ministers to preach, any doctrine which is contrary to the reason he hath pleased to endow us with; but for his own wise ends has thought fit to conceal from us the nature of the thing he commands; thereby to try our faith

faith and obedience, and encrease our dependence upon him.

It is highly probable, that if God should please to reveal unto us this great mystery of the Trinity, or some other mysteries in our holy religion, we should not be able to understand them, unless he would at the same time think fit to bestow on us some new powers or faculties of the mind, which we want at present, and are reserved till the day of resurrection to life eternal. *For now, as the apostle says, we see through a glass darkly, but then face to face.*

Thus, we see, the matter is brought to this issue; we must either believe what God directly commands us in holy scripture, or we must wholly reject the scripture and the Christian religion which we pretend to profess: but this, I hope, is too desperate a step for any of us to make.

I have already observed, that those who preach up the belief of the Trinity, or of any other mystery, cannot propose any temporal advantage to themselves by so doing. But this is not the case of those who oppose these doctrines.

Do they lead better moral lives than a good Christian? are they more just in their dealings? more chaste, or temperate, or charitable? Nothing at all of this; but on the contrary, their intent is to overthrow all religion, that they may gratify their vices without any reproach from the world or their own conscience; and are zealous to bring over as many others as they can to their own opinions; because it is some kind of imaginary comfort to have a multitude on their side.

There is no miracle mentioned in holy writ, which, if it were strictly examined, is not as much contrary to common reason, and as much a mystery, as this doctrine of the Trinity; and therefore we may with equal justice deny the truth of them all. For instance: it is against the laws of nature, that a human body should be able to walk upon the water, as St. Peter is recorded to have done; or that a dead carcase should be raised from the grave after three days, when it began to corrupt; which those who understand anatomy will pronounce to be impossible by the common rules of nature and reason. Yet these mira-

cles, and many others, are positively affirmed in the gospel; and these we must believe, or give up our holy religion to atheists and infidels.

I shall now make a few inferences and observations from what hath been said.

First, It would be well if people would not lay so much weight on their own reason in matters of religion, as to think every thing impossible and absurd which they cannot conceive. How often do we contradict the right rules of reason in the whole course of our lives? Reason itself is true and just, but the reason of every particular man is weak and wavering, perpetually swayed and turned by his interests, his passions, and his vices. Let any man but consider when he hath a controversy with another, though his cause be ever so unjust, though the whole world be against him, how blinded he is by the love of himself, to believe that right is wrong, and wrong is right, when it makes for his own advantage. Where is then the right use of his reason which he so much boasts of, and which he would blasphemously set up to controul the commands of the Almighty?

Secondly, When men are tempted to deny the mysteries of religion, let them examine and search into their own hearts, whether they have not some favourite sin which is of their party in this dispute, and which is equally contrary to other commands of God in the gospel. For why do men love darkness rather than light? The scripture tells us, *because their deeds are evil*; and there can be no other reason assigned. Therefore when men are curious and inquisitive to discover some weak sides in Christianity, and inclined to favour every thing that is offered to its disadvantage, it is plain they wish it were not true, and those wishes can proceed from nothing but an evil conscience; because, if there be truth in our religion, their condition must be miserable.

And therefore, thirdly, Men should consider that raising difficulties concerning the mysteries in religion, cannot make them more wise, learned, or virtuous; better neighbours, or friends, or more serviceable to their country; but, whatever they pretend, will destroy their inward peace of mind, by perpetual doubts and fears arising in their breasts.

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And God forbid we should ever see the times so bad, when dangerous opinions in religion will be a means to get favour and preferment; although even in such a case it would be an ill traffic, to gain the world, and lose our own souls. So that upon the whole it will be impossible to find any real use toward a virtuous or happy life, by denying the mysteries of the gospel.

Fourthly, Those strong unbelievers, who expect that all mysteries should be squared and fitted to their own reason, might have somewhat to say for themselves, if they could satisfy the general reason of mankind in their other opinions; but herein they are miserably defective, absurd, and ridiculous; they strain at a gnat, and swallow a camel; they can believe that the world was made by chance; that God doth not concern himself with things below, will neither punish vice, nor reward virtue; that religion was invented by cunning men to keep the world in awe; with many other opinions equally false and detestable, against the common light of nature as well as reason; against the universal sentiments of all civilized nations, and offensive to the ears even of a sober heathen.

Lastly, Since the world abounds with pestilent books particularly written against the doctrine of the Trinity; it is fit to inform you, that the authors of them proceed wholly upon a mistake: they would shew how impossible it is that three can be one, and one can be three; whereas the scripture saith no such thing, at least in that manner they would make it: but only that there is some kind of unity and distinction in the divine nature, which mankind cannot possibly comprehend. Thus the whole doctrine is short and plain, and in itself incapable of any controversy; since God himself hath pronounced the fact, but wholly concealed the manner. And therefore many divines who thought fit to answer those wicked books, have been mistaken too, by answering fools in their folly; and endeavouring to explain a mystery which God intended to keep secret from us. And as I would exhort all men to

avoid reading those wicked books written against this doctrine, as dangerous and pernicious; so I think they may omit the answers, as unnecessary. This I confess will probably affect but few or none among the generality of our congregations, who do not much trouble themselves with books, at least of this kind. However, many who do not read themselves, are seduced by others that do; and thus become unbelievers upon trust, and at second hand; and this is too frequent a case: for which reason I have endeavoured to put this doctrine upon a short and sure foot, levelled to the meanest understanding; by which we may, as the apostle directs, be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh us a reason of the hope that is in us, with meekness and fear.

And thus I have done with my subject, which probably I should not have chosen, if I had not been invited to it by the occasion of this season, appointed on purpose to celebrate the mysteries of the Trinity, and the descent of the Holy Ghost, wherein we pray to be kept steadfast in this faith; and what this faith is, I have shewn you in the plainest manner I could. For, upon the whole, it is no more than this: God commands us, by our dependence upon his truth and his holy word, to believe a fact that we do not understand. And this is no more than what we do every day in the works of nature, upon the credit of men of learning. Without faith we can do no works acceptable to God; for if they proceed from any other principle, they will not advance our salvation; and this faith, as I have explained it, we may acquire without giving up our senses, or contradicting our reason. May God of his infinite mercy inspire us with true faith in every article and mystery of our holy religion, so as to dispose us to do what is pleasing in his sight; and this we pray through Jesus Christ, to whom, with the Father and the Holy Ghost, the mysterious incomprehensible one God, be all honour and glory now and for evermore. Amen.

S E R M O N XCVI.

By BISHOP ATTERBURY.

On Advent Sunday.

ST. MATTHEW, xi. 3.

Art thou he that should come? or do we look for another?

AT this time of Advent, particularly dedicated by the church to a devout commemoration of our Saviour's coming in the flesh, and set apart to prepare us for a worthy celebration of the approaching feast of his nativity; it may be no unsuitable entertainment to your thoughts, to suggest to you some reflections on this passage of scripture, and those others which introduce, accompany, and explain it.

When John had heard in prison (says the evangelist) the works of Christ, he sent two of his disciples, and said unto him, Art thou he that should come? or do we look for another? That is, Art thou the Messiah, the great Redeemer of Israel, whose coming was foretold by the prophets, and is now expected with great impatience by the whole body of the Jews, and before whom I am sent as his forerunner and harbinger? Jesus answered, and said unto them, Go, and shew John again those things which ye do hear and see. The blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached unto them. And blessed is he, whosoever shall not be offended in me! As if he had said, Judge ye yourselves, by the works which I now perform, whether I am the Messiah or not. or what reason there can be to doubt of my divine mission and authority.

This transaction is extremely remarkable, and will afford much useful matter to our reflections, in relation both to the inquiry made by the Baptist, and the answer returned by our Lord to that inquiry.

And Ist, as to the inquiry itself, it may be matter of just surprise to us, that the Baptist should, so long after he had continued discharging the office of Christ's harbinger, put such a question as this to our Saviour; Art thou he that should come? or do we look for another? For could John be ignorant of our Saviour's character? Could he entertain the least doubt of it?

He who had formerly baptized Christ, had seen the Spirit descend on him in the form of a dove, and heard the voice from heaven thus testifying concerning him, *This is my well-beloved Son in whom I am well pleased?* He, who had borne record of our Lord more than once, that he was *the Son of God, the Lamb of God, that taketh away the sins of the world?* (John, i. xxxiv. 29.) Could he possibly afterward be under any degree of hesitancy or doubt, in relation to our Saviour's character? Certainly he could not; and therefore we must look out for some other reason of his sending this message, beside the desire of satisfying himself: and that plainly was the procuring satisfaction to those by whom the message was sent, his disciples and followers, who notwithstanding all the asseverations of John to this purpose, continued still incredulous; we may suppose, for these reasons:

1. Because they saw their master imprisoned, and now likely to be put to death, for preaching up the kingdom of God, and the coming of the Messiah; and could not apprehend, that, had Jesus been that Messiah, he should have wanted power or will to employ that power for the Baptist's deliverance. And yet so far was this from being the case, that our Saviour doth not appear once to have made an honourable mention of John, till after the disciples, who came upon this errand, had left him. Then indeed, and not before, the evangelist tells us, *Jesus began to say unto the multitudes, what went ye out into the wilderness to see?* (Matt. ix. 7.) and to take that occasion of enlarging on the Baptist's character, and the dignity of his office.

2. They might have observed, that our Saviour had not himself hitherto asserted his right to that title, but declined all occasions that had been given him of directly and openly owning himself to be the Messiah: which conduct, though necessary, in order to carry on and complete his ministry, without interruption from the Roman powers, was yet what the disciples of John, who had heard their master preaching up the kingdom of the Messiah without any disguise, could not understand; nor account for any otherwise, than by supposing that Jesus arrogated not that honour to himself, as being conscious that it did not belong to him.

him. And these suspicions might be raised, by their observing.

3. The manner of our Saviour's life and conversation, which was so very different from that of their master's, and had so much less an outward appearance of sanctity in it. *The one came neither eating nor drinking* (Matt. xi. 18.), delighted in solitude, and lived in the practice of the highest rigours and austerities; the other *came eating and drinking*, lived in the world, and according to all the innocent customs of it; conversing freely and promiscuously with all sorts of men, even with publicans and sinners. And therefore they were tempted to think, that he, who was so far beneath their master in what they called perfection and holiness, could not be so far above him in his character and office, as, if he were the Messiah, he must have been.

These doubts it is probable that John had very often endeavoured to remove: but finding that they still stuck with his followers, he took the last and best way of satisfying them, by sending them on this message to Jesus himself, and giving them, by that means, an opportunity of being eye and ear witnesses of his works, and of his doctrine, which, he knew, would effectually convince them.

Thus much concerning the inquiry: we are now to consider,

1stly, The reply which our Saviour made to it. In which reply there are two things observable; the manner and the matter of it.

As to the manner of it, we see, it is not direct and positive; but so ordered only, as to give them an occasion of answering that question themselves, which they had proposed to our blessed Saviour. This method, as it was agreeable to his conduct in other cases, and requisite to secure him from the accusations of those who watched his words, whenever he taught in public, so had it this further use in it; that it implanted a conviction on the inquirers, after the most gentle, reasonable, and winning way, without commanding and extorting their assent by an authoritative declaration of the truth which he thus invited them to receive. The proper motives and evidences only were laid before them; and they afterward were left to frame the conclusion from thence; that so their faith, which was to entitle them to such glori-

ous privileges, might be a free and voluntary act, and the test of an ingenuous and well-disposed mind.

As to the matter of our Saviour's answer, three things there are which deserve to be weighed by us:—the remarkable gradation and rise there is in the particulars there mentioned; the apposition of it in relation to the inquirers; and the general force and evidence of the argument contained in it.

1. To begin with the first of these: *Go and shew John again*, says our Saviour, *those things which ye do hear and see*; and then he particularly mentions the bodily cures he wrought on the deaf and blind, the lame and the lepers. He adds beyond this a yet plainer instance of a miraculous and divine power, *the dead are raised up*; and he seems to advance still somewhat further, when he says, that even *the poor have the gospel preached unto them*. An instance of goodness and condescension, with which the Jews had before been but little acquainted! The prophets of that nation had been sent always to great and mighty persons, to reclaim their princes and rulers, and to reprove exemplary wickedness in high places; and, to manifest the authority of their commission to them, were sometimes armed with the power of miracles. But nothing could be more wonderful, than to see a prophet in Jewry preaching to the poor and meek; addressing himself to the lowest and meanest of men; exhorting them to virtue, removing their prejudices, and rectifying their errors! Such applications amidst that people were so unusual, and exceeding rare, that our Saviour thought fit to conclude the enumeration of the several proofs of his mission with these two particulars: *The dead are raised up*, says he, *and the poor have the gospel preached unto them*.

2. The apposition of our Saviour's answer, in relation to the persons who made the inquiry, is what we are next to consider. And here

First, we may observe, what a natural occasion he takes of resolving their doubts, from what he was even then saying and doing in their presence, *Go, and shew John again those things which ye do hear and see*: that is, you come to learn of me, whether I am the Messiah: your master hath often told you that I am; but ye will not believe him.

To

To him you should have given ear, who is my professed harbinger and herald; to me it belongs not so properly to proclaim my own titles, and assert my own authority. For if *I bear witness of myself, my witness is not true* (John, v. 31.); it is liable to suspicion, and likely to be of little weight and authority with you. If ye suspect your master's testimony of me, much more will ye suspect that which I give of myself. Behold therefore the testimony of God! for *the works which I do* (which ye now see done before your eyes, they) *bear witness of me, that the Father hath sent me.* (Ibid. ver. 36.) If ye still doubt who I am, why ask ye me? ask the works, which you cannot doubt whether I do or not; and they shall tell you.

Secondly, Nothing could be better contrived to satisfy these inquirers, of our Saviour's pre-eminence over the Baptist, than these wonders which they saw him perform, and heard him now appeal to; since they knew very well, that their master had not the gift of miracles, nor pretended to the power of doing them; and could not therefore but see that his ministry was inferior to that of Christ, and subordinate to it; especially since from the Baptist's own mouth they had learnt, that the *doing of miracles* should be one illustrious and discriminating mark of the Messiah; for so much, I think, that passage in the gospel of St. John sufficiently implies—*Many who resorted unto Jesus said, John did no miracles; but all things which John spoke of this man, were true* (Ibid. x. 41.); that is, though he did none himself, yet he prophesied that Jesus should do them; and when his disciples therefore saw that prediction fulfilled, they were able themselves to answer their own question, *Art thou he that should come? or do we look for another?* Farther,

Thirdly, The particular facts, which our Saviour here mentions, in order to insinuate his pre-eminence over the Baptist, are extremely well suited to that purpose. They are all acts of beneficence and kindness, wrought for the service and benefit of men, either for the instruction of their minds, or the healing of their bodies. And this, he tacitly suggests to them, was a far nobler employment, and carried in it a much greater degree of perfection and use, than the solitary life and rigid austerities

of the Baptist, for which his disciples held him in such high veneration. He hints to them the reasons for which he lived and conversed thus publicly and familiarly, and applied himself to men in the most humane, easy, and affable manner, without distinguishing himself from others by any rough and frightening appearances, any thing extraordinary and singular, either in his look, attire, or behaviour, for which the Baptist was remarkable: and he leaves them even in this respect to consider, whether his character was not superior to that of their master, and his administration ordained to more excellent purposes; and therefore he concludes his reply with words which have an eye to those prejudices they had entertained against him on this account; *blessed are they who are not offended in me!*

Beyond all this, it is, in the

Fourth place, extremely remarkable, that the answer of our Lord to these inquiring disciples is expressed in words taken from a prophecy of Isaiah concerning the Messiah. And Isaiah was, of all the prophets, he, in whose writings the Baptist's followers were the most conversant, and for whom they had the greatest esteem and reverence; inasmuch as their Master was there more particularly pointed out, the person and office of this cryer in the wilderness was there more exactly described, than in any other part of the sacred volume. And therefore what this prophet testified concerning the Messiah, was best suited to work those into a reception of him, who had been led by his testimony to discern even their Master himself, and to become his followers.

Now the places here referred to in Isaiah, are these, chap. lxi. 1. *The spirit of the Lord is upon me, because the Lord hath appointed me to preach good tidings to the meek.* Εὐαγγελίζασθαι τοῖς πτωχοῖς, as it is in the translation of the Septuagint; and the very same phrase is employed here, in the text, πτωχοὶ εὐαγγελίζονται, *The poor have the gospel preached unto them.* The rest of the particulars may be almost entirely supplied from another passage in the xxxvth of the same prophet, ver. 4, 5, 6. *Behold, your God will come with vengeance, even God with a recompence; he will come and save you. Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped: Then shall the lame* man

man leap as an hart, and the tongue of the dumb shall sing.

It is very probable that the Baptist himself might have an eye to this passage, when he sent his doubting disciples with this question to our Saviour, *Art thou he that should come?* Since we find there a promise, within the compass of a few words, twice repeated, that God *would come, would come* to save his people; and therefore our Saviour, very appositely, sent them back again to the same prophet in his reply, and taught them by that means to understand the true drift and meaning of their master's question. It is as if he had said, You believe not the Baptist's testimony, that I am *he who should come*; yet surely Isaiah, upon whose authority ye have received the Baptist himself, will find credit with you; and he hath thus prophesied of me.

Every way we see the answer of our blessed Redeemer was so wisely and graciously contrived, as to meet with all the prejudices and dispel all the doubts of these inquirers, and to lead them into an acknowledgment that they had found the Messiah whom they sought, *him who was to come*, and were no longer to look for another.

3. Nay, these words carry in them (as I in the third place observed) an argument of more general use and influence, and propose to us all the chief marks and characters of such miracles, as are sufficient to confirm the authority of any person pretending to be sent by God; and all of which concurred in the miracles done by our Messiah; as any unprejudiced person, who compares them together, may easily perceive. I shall but just mention them as they are hinted to us in the words of our Saviour's reply, and leave the farther consideration of them to your private meditations. Now the

(1.) Mark and character of such a miracle, as can be the proper evidence of a divine mission, is, that it be above the known powers of all natural causes: and such were all the instantaneous cures here mentioned; and particularly the raising men from the dead.

(2.) A second character is, that they be done publicly and in the face of the world, that there may be no room to suspect artifice and collusion: and such were the wonders to which our Lord appealed.

— Go tell John again, says he, *those things which ye do hear and see*; which are done here before your eyes, and in the midst of a great multitude.

(3.) A third thing requisite is, that the doctrine which they are brought to vouch, be every way worthy of God, and fit thus to be sealed and attested by him. *The gospel is preached*, says our Lord; the most perfect scheme of morality that ever mankind was acquainted with.

(4.) It is yet a farther recommendation of such miracles, if they carry in them marks not only of an astonishing power, but of good-will also, and beneficence to men; as the healing of the blind, the lepers, and the lame, here in the text, manifestly did.

(5.) If the very doing of them was foretold, and the time and person declared by the spirit of prophecy; for so I have shewn that our Saviour, in his account of the mighty works here done, referred himself to the predictions of Isaiah.

(6.) If there be no appearances of self-interest and design in the worker of such miracles; and this objection our Lord also removes, where he says, that the *poor had the gospel preached unto them*; the poor, to whom no man would apply, who proposed to himself temporal views and aims, which they (alas!) could no ways forward.

Thus have I endeavoured to open to you, very largely, the significance of each word in this important passage; and particularly the wonderful address of our Lord, in applying himself to those who resorted to him for instruction, and in reasoning them into conviction by arguments and suggestions peculiarly accommodated to the notions and apprehensions they were under.—Our chief business indeed, from such places as these, is, to inculcate into the minds of Christians, the practical lessons of piety contained in the gospel; to convince them of the reasonableness, beauty, and usefulness of those precepts; and to inflame them with ardent desires of excelling therein. However, such speculative inquiries as these have also their use, and may sometimes deserve a place in your minds; as contributing to raise your attention in perusing the several parts of holy writ, and to improve and quicken you in your manner of meditating upon them; and as assisting you toward a discovery of those inesti-

inestimable treasures of divine wisdom, which are hidden in that sacred volume. We generally, I fear, consult the scriptures too negligently, and reflect on them too superficially, with no greater degree of attention and care, than we employ in perusing mere human compositions, (and I would to God we employed always as much in the one case as in the other!) We do not sufficiently consider, who it is that speaks to us there, nor what it is that he says: what weight, what fullness of sense, what excellent variety of matter, and wonderful depth of thought, there must needs be in words dictated by, or at least spoken under, the over-ruling influence of infinite wisdom. And therefore, though the scriptures are read every day in our churches, (and sometimes perhaps consulted in our closets,) yet we make but slow proficiency toward a true taste, and a clear discernment, of those high truths which are contained in them. We dwell on the letter only, on what offers itself to us at the first view; but we do not make ourselves acquainted with the life and spirit of them. And yet for this reason, among others, these holy writings were left us by God, that we might, as good David speaks, *exercise ourselves in them day and night*, have perpetual matter for our inquiries into, and improvements in, the knowledge of things divine, and drink always of these waters of life, without either allaying our thirst, or exhausting the spring from whence they flow.

The difference between the holy scriptures and other writings, is much the same as that between the works of art and nature. The works of art appear to most advantage at first, but will not bear a nice and repeated examination: the more curiously we pry into them, the less we shall admire them. But the works of nature will bear a thousand views and reviews, and yet still be instructive and still wonderful. In like manner the writings of mere men, though ever so excellent in their kind, yet strike and surprise us most upon our first perusal of them; and then flatten upon our taste by degrees, as our familiarity with them increases. Whereas the word of revelation is, like its author, of an endless and unsearchable perfection; and the more we look into it, and revolve it in our minds, the more reason still shall we

find to admire and adore the wisdom of the great revealer of it.

I have therefore hinted to you some thoughts concerning the drift of our Saviour's reasoning, and the peculiar apposition of it in relation to the persons who made the inquiry in the text; that I might excite you from thence to meditate in like manner on the other parts of the book of God, which are equally *profitable for doctrine, and able to make us wise unto salvation, through faith which is in Christ Jesus.* (2 Tim. iii. 15.)

Wherefore, *search the scriptures*, for as *in them ye have eternal life*, so have ye room also for an eternal growth and improvement in that knowledge which leads to it; in that knowledge, which we can here attain unto in part only, but shall hereafter, when the veil of this flesh is done away, more perfectly comprehend: and the more earnestly we aspire after it, and labour for it in this state of imperfection, the more exalted a degree of it shall we possess in another world. And do thou, "Blessed Lord, who hast caused all holy scriptures to be written for our instruction, grant that we may in such wise read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, that by patience and comfort of thy holy word we may embrace and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life, which thou hast given us in our Saviour Jesus Christ."

S E R M O N XCVII.

By ISAAC TERRY, M. A.

Rector of St. Mary Bredman and St. Andrew in Canterbury.

On Christmas Day.

GAL. iv. 4, 5.

When the fulness of time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law; to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons.

THE design of the apostle's discourse in this place is to convince the Galatians that there was no obligation upon Christians to observe the law of Moses. To which end he reasons thus:—Under the Mosaic dispensation the church was in her minority; but under the gospel she is at full age. Wherefore when the gospel

gospel came, the Levitical law, which was calculated only for the nonage of the church, had no longer any power over her. For as an heir, while he is a child, is under the direction of tutors and governors, till the time appointed by his father's will, but when that time is come, enters upon the estate, and is no longer subject to his former governors; even so the people of God, while they were children, were in bondage under the elements of the world; *i. e.* were subject to the ordinances of the Levitical law; but when God's appointed time was expired, the children of God were freed from their former servitude by the coming of Christ, entered upon the possession of those blessings which he purchased for them, and enjoyed the privileges of adult sons. *When the fulness of time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law; to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons.*

In which words there are these three things considerable;

I. The time of the Messiah's coming; *when the fulness of time was come.*

II. A character and description of the Messiah; he was the Son of God, *made of a woman, made under the law.*

III. The end and design of his coming; *to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons.*

First, The time of the Messiah's coming; *when the fulness of time was come; i. e.* when the time appointed by God, and prefixed by the prophets, was expired.

Three remarkable predictions there are in the Old Testament, pointing out the time of the Messiah's coming. The first, of the patriarch Jacob; the second, of the prophet Daniel; the third, of the prophet Haggai.

The prediction of Jacob is recorded by Moses in the xlixth chapter of Genesis, in these words: *The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come.* That by Shiloh is signified the Messiah, is acknowledged by the most ancient Jewish writers; who all agree, that the meaning of these words of Jacob is this:—The descendants of Judah shall not be dispossessed of the sovereign power, nor cease to be governed by their own laws, till

the Messiah shall appear. Now about twelve years after the birth of our Saviour, it must be confessed that the sceptre began to depart from Judah. For at that time Judæa was made a province of the Roman empire; and the power of life and death was taken from the Jews, and lodged in the hands of the Roman procurator. And within less than forty years after our Lord's crucifixion, the whole Jewish polity was, together with their city, quite overthrown; and there hath been no sceptre in Judah, nor any lawgiver between his feet, ever since; but from that time to this the Jews have been dispersed over the face of the whole earth, and subjected to the laws of the several countries in which they sojourn.

In the latter part of the ixth chapter of the book of the prophet Daniel, the angel Gabriel foretels the exact time of our blessed Saviour's death, when transgression was to be finished, and an end was to be made of sins, and reconciliation for iniquity, and everlasting righteousness was to be brought in, and the vision and prophecy to be sealed up, and the Most Holy to be anointed, and Messiah was to be cut off, though not for himself. All which was to happen within seventy weeks of years from the time of the going forth of the commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem. Now if from the time of the going forth of this commandment in the reign of Artaxerxes, we count downwards four hundred and ninety years, they will expire in the nineteenth year of Tiberius the Roman emperor; in which year, in the month Nisan, Jesus Christ suffered death upon the cross; and by his death took away the guilt of sin, appeased the wrath of God, and procured justification for all believing penitents; or, in the language of the angel, he finished transgression, and made an end of sins, and made reconciliation for iniquity, and brought in everlasting righteousness. At the same time all the types and prophecies which concerned the life, suffering, and death of the Messiah, were punctually fulfilled; and so the vision and prophecy were sealed up. Moreover, Jesus Christ during his public ministry acted as a prophet; at his death he was consecrated a priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec; and after his resurrection he entered

tered upon his kingly office, and was invested with all power in heaven and in earth; to all which high functions he was anointed with the Holy Ghost, which the Father gave to him without measure; and so the Most Holy was anointed.

We may farther observe, that the seventy weeks are by the angel divided into three distinct periods, *i. e.* into seven weeks, sixty-two weeks, and one week.

The seven weeks, containing forty-nine years, are allotted for restoring Jerusalem, and building again the street and the wall; *i. e.* for the settling and reforming the Jewish government in church and state; which work having met with much opposition, was finished by Nehemiah, forty-nine years after it had been begun by Ezra.

To these seven weeks succeeds another period of sixty-two weeks, or four hundred and thirty-four years; which will bring us down to the time when John the Baptist preached in the wilderness, and prepared the way of the Messiah. Our Lord himself hath warranted us to date the beginning of the gospel from this time; for, saith he, the law and the prophets were until John, and since that time the kingdom of God is preached. And so from the going forth of the commandment to restore and build again Jerusalem, unto the Messiah the Prince, were seven weeks and threescore and two weeks.

These were followed by a third period of one week, or seven years. The ministry of John the Baptist continued three years and a half of these seven; and during the remaining three years and a half, Jesus Christ in person preached the kingdom of heaven, and invited men to embrace the terms of the new covenant; which covenant he in the end of the seventh year ratified with his blood, which he shed for the sins of men. By his death the ceremonial law was abolished, and the sacrifices and oblations commanded by it ceased to be of any farther use; they having been instituted only as types of that one available sacrifice, which Christ offered to his Father upon the altar of the cross; himself being both the high priest, and the lamb of God bearing the sins of the world. And thus after seven weeks and threescore and two weeks, *i. e.* in the last of the seventy weeks, Messiah was cut off, but

not for himself. And he confirmed the covenant with many for one week; and in the half, the latter half of the week, he caused the sacrifice and oblation to cease.

Not many years after the death of Christ, the guilt of his innocent and sacred blood drew on the Jews that terrible vengeance, which God executed upon them by the hands of the Romans, who fully verified those words of the prophecy, *The people of the Prince that shall come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary; and the end thereof shall be with a flood, and unto the end of the war desolations are determined, and with the abominable armies he shall make it desolate, even until the consummation, and that determined shall be poured upon the desolate.*

The prophet Haggai plainly declares, that the Messiah should make his appearance in the second temple; the very foundations of which were, as the Jews themselves testify, torn up with a plow-share, so that not one stone was left upon another, above sixteen hundred years ago. This prediction of Haggai is in the second chapter of his prophecy at verse 6, and it runs thus: *Thus saith the Lord of Hosts, yet once, it is a little while, and I will shake the heavens, and the earth, and the sea, and the dry land; and I will shake all nations, and the desire (or expectation) of all nations shall come, and I will fill this house with glory, saith the Lord of Hosts. The silver is mine, and the gold is mine, saith the Lord of Hosts. The glory of this latter house shall be greater than of the former, saith the Lord of Hosts; and in this house will I give peace, saith the Lord of Hosts.*

By shaking the heavens and the earth and all nations, are signified those great commotions and revolutions in the kingdoms of the world, which happened between the time of this prophecy and the nativity of our Saviour. For in that interval of time the Persian empire was suddenly overthrown by the Grecians; and after long wars the Grecians themselves, and all the nations which they had conquered, were subjected to the Romans: and Augustus was in peaceable possession of the empire of the world when Jesus our Messiah was born; who might well be styled the Expectation of the Nations, since (as pagan histories have assured us) about this time there

went;

went a rumour through all the eastern countries, that out of Judæa should arise those who should rule over the whole world. Our Lord during his abode on earth frequently honoured the temple with his presence; and in it he, who by the prophet Isaiah is called the Prince of Peace, and by St. Paul our peace, preached the gospel of peace. And though probably the second temple never equalled the first in point of beauty and magnificence; though the second temple wanted several tokens of the divine favour which the first enjoyed; such as the ark of the covenant, and the mercy seat, from whence God gave answers by an audible voice, the Shecinah or manifestation of the divine presence in a bright cloud over the mercy seat, the oracle of Urim and Thummim, and the holy fire which descended from heaven; which were greater ornaments to a temple than all the silver and gold in the world; yet these things were not so great a glory to the former house, as the bodily presence of the Messiah was to the latter; as will evidently appear if we consider,

Secondly, The character and description which is given of the Messiah in the text, viz. That he was the Son of God, made of a woman, made under the law.

In the first place then, he was the Son of God, to whose honour the temple was dedicated; a Son not unworthy of such a Father; being himself both Lord and God, Lord of lords, and over all, God blessed for evermore; the brightness of his Father's glory, and the express image of his person. By whose ineffable ministry the almighty Architect built the worlds; who, according to the unanimous opinion of antiquity, supported by many testimonies of scripture, frequently appeared in the form of God to the patriarchs and prophets, as the angel of God's presence, his word, his oracle, the interpreter and revealer of his will; who conversed with Adam in Paradise; who shut up Noah in the ark which he had instructed him to build, and brought the deluge upon the world of the ungodly; who having received power from his Father to judge the Sodomites, rained down fire upon them from the Lord out of heaven; who was seen by Jacob standing at the top of the mystic ladder, which reached from heaven to the earth; who spake to Moses out of the burning bush;

whose voice shook the earth at the delivery of the fiery law, when he came down upon mount Sinai, attended with twenty thousand chariots of God, even thousands of angels; who went before the camp of the Israelites, in a cloudy pillar by day, and in a pillar of fire by night; who sustained six hundred thousand men, besides women and children, with water out of the rock, and with bread dropped from the clouds forty years; before whom Joshua fell on his face to the earth, paying to him that worship which was due to the captain of the host of the Lord; whom Isaiah saw sitting on a throne high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple; whom Daniel in the night-visions beheld coming with the clouds of heaven, and receiving from the Ancient of Days dominion and glory, and an everlasting kingdom over all people, nations, and languages; to whom upon his resurrection the Father actually committed all power in heaven and in earth, and advanced him to his own right hand in the heavenly places, to sit down with him in his throne, far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world but in that which is to come; that unto him our Saviour, our King and our God, according to the good pleasure of the almighty Father, who hath put all things under his feet, every knee should bow, of things in heaven and things in earth, and things under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that he is Lord to the glory of God the Father.

This sublime person, this Lord of Glory, at the time appointed by his Father, emptied himself of the form of God, and, as the text informs us, was made of a woman. By which expression St. Paul plainly asserts the truth and reality of our Saviour's humanity, in opposition to a sect of heretics as early as the apostle's days, who maintained that Jesus Christ was a mere phantasm, and not a real man; and that he only seemed to be born, to eat and drink, to suffer and die. The same expression is a sufficient confutation of another wild opinion advanced by some, that our Lord did not derive his body from the Virgin his mother, but brought it with him from heaven. If either of these assertions had been true, the apostle could not in any propriety of

speech have said that Christ was made of a woman,

It was absolutely necessary, that the Redeemer of mankind should partake of the nature of those whom he came to redeem. And it was as necessary, that he who was to be a propitiatory sacrifice for the sins of others, should himself be without spot or blemish. That therefore the Son of God might assume our nature without the defilement of it, and become like unto us in all things, sin only excepted; he was (according to the prophecies that went before of him) born of a virgin, who was enabled to conceive by the miraculous operation of the Holy Ghost. The Son of God being in this extraordinary manner made of a woman, wiped off in a great measure that reproach which the mother of mankind had brought upon her sex. For if the woman was seduced by the tongue of the serpent, he who bruised the serpent's head, was, in a strict and peculiar sense, the seed of the woman. If she was first in the transgression, by which death was brought into the world; she was alone in giving birth to him who hath purchased for us life and immortality.

The blessed Virgin being a daughter of Abraham, our Lord was by birth made under the Jewish law. And accordingly he was circumcised the eighth day; and because he was his mother's first-born son, he was (as the law directed in that case) dedicated to the Lord in the temple at Jerusalem. And though the place of his abode was at a considerable distance from that city, he constantly made a journey thither at the time of their solemn festivals. And as he was careful to observe the ritual ordinances of the law, so he yielded a most exact and perfect obedience to the moral precepts of it.

And indeed had he not punctually fulfilled the righteousness of that law under which he was made, he would himself have stood in need of a redeemer; and consequently could not have answered the end of his coming into the world; which was to redeem those that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons; and this is the

Third particular I proposed to speak to.

All who had ever lived under the law, Jesus Christ only excepted, had in some instance or other transgressed it; and so had rendered themselves obnoxious to

the curse denounced against those who should in any one point offend against it. To deliver them from this curse our Lord voluntarily suffered punishment in their stead, the innocent instead of the guilty; and by dying on the cross, became in the eye of the law an accursed person; for it is written, *curst is every one that hangeth on a tree.*

Together with Christ expired the ceremonial law; which was both a heavy yoke upon the Jews, and a wall of partition between them and the gentiles. So that by the death of Christ the Jews were freed from the bondage as well as the curse of the law, and called to enjoy the liberty and privileges of sons.

The gentiles were strangers to the covenant of promise, and had long since revolted from the worship of the true God to idolatry. Wherefore the Jews imagined that they were esteemed by God as spittle, and that they were to have no share in the blessings of the Messiah's kingdom. But the middle wall of partition being broken down by the cross, the distinction between Jew and gentile ceased, and they both became by faith one body of Christ, one church and household of God; the gentiles were admitted to equal privileges with the Jews; and those who had been hitherto far off from God, as well as those who were near to him, received the adoption of sons.

Many and inestimable are the privileges to which the adopted sons of God are entitled. The residence of the Holy Spirit in their hearts is both a pledge of their heavenly Father's love to them at present, and an earnest of the glorious inheritance which he will bestow upon them hereafter. By him they have free access unto God in prayer, and are encouraged to address themselves to him in the familiar and endearing language of sons, saying *Abba, Father.* By the same spirit they are sanctified both in body and soul, and made like unto God; the divine image is restored in them, and they are known to be the children of God by the resemblance which they bear to him. And they who, while they live here, are like to God in holiness, shall one day even in their mortal parts bear the image of his immortality; and shall be further manifested to be the sons of God, by being the sons of the resurrection.

tion. He who is the God not of the dead but of the living, will not suffer his children to continue for ever under the power of death; but will in his due time work for them a glorious liberty from the bondage of corruption, and place them beyond the reach and fear of death and pain and sorrow, in heavenly mansions, where they shall be for ever happy, not only in an entire freedom from all evil, but in the secure possession of all that is good. If they be sons, our apostle rationally concludes, that they shall be heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ, who is the Heir and Lord of all things.

I have now gone through the three particulars which I at first proposed to speak to. From what hath been said upon each of them may be drawn several useful inferences, with which I shall conclude this discourse.

And, first, The coming of our Lord in the fulness of time is a strong confirmation of the faith of Christians, and renders inexcusable the obstinate infidelity of the Jews. That there are in the Old Testament such predictions as I have cited, and that they are genuine, and were not invented, neither have been corrupted by Christians, the Jews themselves, from whom we received them, cannot but acknowledge; and that these predictions were understood by the ancient Jewish doctors as we understand them, their writings still extant do abundantly prove. And it is well known that in our Saviour's time the whole nation of the Jews did expect that the Messiah would suddenly appear; which plainly shews that they were of opinion, that the time assigned by the prophets for his coming was then expiring. Will the Jews blame us either for giving credit to the divine oracles, or for believing in him to whom they bear witness; or for embracing that interpretation of them which was formerly put upon them by their own most approved expositors, and particularly by that generation of men, who were bitter enemies to Jesus Christ and persecuted him to the death? Ought not they who affirm with us that not one tittle of the law or of the prophets shall fail, either to acknowledge our Jesus to be the Messiah, or to direct us to some other Messiah, who appeared within the time limited by the law and the prophets? If

the time appointed for the Messiah's coming be long since lapsed, why do they still continue to expect him? and if they themselves had not for many years believed the time to be lapsed, would they, think we, have expected him daily for seventeen hundred years together?

Secondly, The honour which Jesus Christ hath done to our nature, by taking it upon him, lays us under a strict obligation not to dishonour it by any kind of intemperance or uncleanness. It can be no small crime to bring a reproach upon that nature, which the Son of God hath so highly dignified, and to debase it below that of the four-footed beasts which perish.

The same consideration may serve to raise in us a firm hope of a happy resurrection. If it be a mortification to us to call corruption our father, and the worm our sister, it is on the other hand a mighty consolation to us to consider that he who liveth for ever, and hath the keys of death and of hell, is our brother. Nor can we entertain so mean an opinion of human flesh, as to think it incapable of inheriting glory and immortality, when we reflect, that in human flesh dwelleth the fulness of the Godhead. Our bodies it is true are the least valuable parts of us; they were formed at first out of the dust, and after a short space return to it. Yet ought we not from hence to infer, that our Lord will not think them worth the saving, since it cannot be more beneath him to redeem a body from the grave, than it was to assume one himself, and to be united to it for ever?

That the only-begotten of the Father, who was born before every creature, by whom and for whom all things were made, should freely for a time lay aside his unspeakable Majesty, take part of flesh and blood, load himself with the infirmities and miseries of our nature, and submit to all the burthenome and painful rites of the ceremonial law; this indeed was such an act of humiliation as we can never enough admire, and which we ought ever to have before our eyes, that from thence we may learn to stoop to the meanest offices, and to undergo the greatest difficulties and inconveniencies for the good of our brethren; that the same mind may be in us which was also in Christ Jesus, who being in the form of God, made himself of no reputation, and

took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men.

As it was a wonderful condescension in the Son of God to be made of a woman; so most glorious was the privilege of that thrice happy woman of whom he was made. No sober Christian can possibly either speak or think otherwise of her, than as of a person highly favoured of God. The mother of him whom we adore is without question highly to be honoured, and all generations must call her blessed. Yet it is to be remembered, that she was no more than a woman; and we cannot without idolatry pay to the woman that worship which is due only to the divine person who was born of her.

What hath been said under the third head, concerning the great end and design of Christ's coming, will suggest to us a satisfactory answer to an objection frequently urged against Christianity both by its ancient and modern adversaries; to whom, it seems, it has always appeared incredible, that a person of so high dignity as the Son of God should consent to become man, to live in a mean and despicable and afflicted condition, and at length to die the death of a malefactor. But was it a work unworthy of this great person to redeem a miserable world? and was it not fitting that he who was to instruct men in their duty, and to guide them to eternal happiness, should for a while dwell and converse with them, and live in such a condition as might give him an opportunity to become an illustrious pattern of the most neglected and difficult virtues? Was it not reasonable too, that he who was to deliver sinners from the wrath of God, should some way or other make atonement for those sins which had provoked it? And how could he do that better, nay how can we be sure that he could do it any otherwise, than by suffering instead of the offenders? It was no trivial concern which brought our Lord from heaven to earth; nothing less than the salvation of mankind was the design of his coming into the world. Is it then at all credible, that the Son of God should propose to himself a most noble and glorious end, and not make use of the wisest and most effectual means for the accomplishment of it?

There is therefore but small force of argument in this objection, but there is

a great deal of ingratitude in it. For shall we take occasion from the condescension of the Son of God to despise and reject him; and to make the greatness of his love to us a pretence for refusing obedience to his laws? Surely the lower he humbled himself for our sakes, the higher in all reason ought our gratitude to rise. If we have the least spark of ingenuity in us, it will be our constant endeavour that the whole earth may be full of his glory, who became the Son of man that we might become sons of God; who quitted the glories of heaven for a manger, for a cross, that he might wash us from our sins in his own blood. What language can express such noble acts? What tongue of men or of angels can shew forth all the praise due to ineffable goodness, the breadth and length and depth and height of which pass even the knowledge of a finite mind? Certainly we who were the objects of this superlative goodness, can do no less than devote our whole lives to the service of our generous Benefactor. And since we can never requite him, we should spare no pains to please him, nor think any thing too much to do or to suffer for his sake. No punishment can be thought too severe for us; there will be no room for us to expect any mercy, if we are not to be obliged by numberless and invaluable benefits; if offices of unparalleled friendship done for us while we were enemies, cannot endear our friend to us; if love stronger than death cannot extort from us some suitable returns of thankfulness, love, and obedience.

Not only gratitude to our Redeemer, but the nature of that happy condition to which he hath called us, exacts from us a life of strict holiness and obedience to the divine laws. If we are sons of God, we must be punctual in the discharge of the duties resulting from that relation; otherwise we must look for no blessing from him. To call God Father, while we live in disobedience to his commands, is in effect to bring an accusation against ourselves; for if he be a Father, where is his honour?

A course of iniquity renders us incapable of bearing so near and honourable a relation to the Deity. Regeneration is a necessary preparative for adoption; nor can we be the sons of God, unless we are born again of the Spirit. As many as are

led by the Spirit, saith St. Paul, are the sons of God: for by the Spirit we are made partakers of a divine nature, and the divine perfections are stamped upon our souls. The resembling God in our dispositions and actions, the imitating him as dear children, is the surest demonstration that we are born of him. Both the children of God and the children of the devil will do the works of their father; by which they are easily distinguished one from the other.

Again, If we are sons of God, this may encourage us to lay before him all our wants and grievances, and to put up our petitions to him with firm confidence that we shall receive from him whatever is necessary and convenient for us. For, as our Lord very strongly argues, *What man is there, who, if his son ask bread, will give him a stone? or if he ask a fish, will give him a serpent? If then men that are evil know how to give good gifts unto their children, how much more shall our Father which is in heaven give good things unto them that ask him?* Add to this, that we have such an intercessor with the Father, as we ourselves, if we understood our own interest, would wish for, even Jesus Christ the righteous; who being by nature the only Son of God, cannot fail of obtaining whatsoever he shall request for us; who being also the Son of man, is most ready to do what in him lies for us his brethren. Of his benign and merciful disposition, and of his tender concern for mankind in particular, he gave abundant proof, when he took on him, not the nature of angels, but the seed of Abraham. And we may be sure that his compassions are not abated, by the experience he hath had of the sorrows and uneasinesses incident to our condition. He hath not forgotten, it is impossible he should forget, the agonies which pierced him through in the days of his flesh, and from which he prayed again and again to be delivered with strong crying and tears. Having therefore himself deeply tasted of misery, he is strongly inclined to pity and to succour the miserable.

Furthermore, The consideration that we are sons of God, may be of special use to support and comfort us under all troubles and calamities. The bitterness

of afflictions will be very much allayed, when we can look upon them as the chastisements or trials of a loving father. God is never kinder to us than when he exercises us with adversity, either for the amendment of our faults, or for the improvement and manifestation of our virtues. It has ever been usual with him to train up his dearest sons to glory by the discipline of the cross. Even Jesus Christ his only begotten, in whom he was always pleased, and in whom was no sin, learned obedience by the things which he suffered. He was long a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief, before he was advanced above all principality and power. And were we truly wise, we should not desire to be entirely exempted from those allotments of providence, which are indeed the evidences of our sonship, and tokens of the Almighty's love to us. We should be rather apt to be uneasy, and to suspect the worst of our condition, if God did not sometimes deal with us, as he is wont to do with those whom he acknowledges for his children. Well may we bear not only with patience, but with thankfulness, those corrections, which are intended for our benefit; and we may even glory in those persecutions and tribulations, which speak us the darlings of the Almighty, and by which we are conformed to the image of his best beloved Son.

Lastly, Since we are all of us sons of one and the same God, let us love like brethren. Since we all pretend to be guided and governed by the same spirit, the spirit of adoption, let us shew that we are so, by being like-minded, by mutual kindness, charity, and forbearance. Since we all make up but one great family, let us study to promote the peace and union of that family to which we belong. Nothing can be more prejudicial to the interests of the household of God, than the dividing it against itself. Since we are all entitled to the same glorious promises, and are co-heirs of the heavenly inheritance, let us converse together in this world, as persons who hope to meet in another, and to be happy in the society of each other to all eternity.

Which God grant that we may all be, for the sake of Jesus Christ; *To whom, &c.*

S E R M O N XCVIII.

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The Difficulties of a virtuous Life not so formidable as to discourage the Pursuit of it.

MATTHEW, vii. 14.

Strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life; and few there be that find it.

OUR blessed Lord, in these words, represents to us the difficulties which attend the Christian course; and, as a consequence of these difficulties, he tells us, that few there be, who have either the courage to venture on it, or the constancy to persevere in it.

The consideration of this hath proved a great obstruction to the practice of religion. For, though it be allowed that the duties of Christianity are not strictly impossible to be complied with, yet still, if there are such hardships to be encountered, as seem to be above an ordinary resolution, the event will be much the same, as though they were strictly and absolutely impossible. Pretences will be made, and pleas drawn from hence, to put off the difficult task, to shrink back from the trial, and to rest in a lazy neglect of that obedience, which men are obliged, by the strongest ties, to practise.

This subject therefore is proper to be considered. But, before I proceed to the particular examination of it, I must be so free as to acknowledge, that the matter of fact, on which men build, is, in a great measure, true and certain. The difficulties in a steady and uniform practice of our duty, are confessedly many and great; rugged are the paths of virtue; unpleasant, till long tried, are its ways; and *strait the gate which leadeth unto life*. The yoke and burthen which Christ lays upon us, (though it be rendered light and easy by the hand which imposed it,) is yet a yoke, and a burthen still; and therefore necessarily implies (what all burthens must imply) something uneasy and painful to us. All this we are ready to acknowledge.

But, on the other hand, I cannot but observe, what a wrong inference and de-

duction those men make from it, who, by the difficulties of virtue, are discouraged from the practice of it; and how grossly they misapply and pervert this concession. For when our Saviour compares the Christian life to a strait gate, and represents it by the obvious metaphor of a narrow way, it was not his design to discourage us from attempting it; but, on the contrary, he makes use of it as an incentive to our most brisk endeavours. When he describes the gate as strait, and the way as narrow, he urges from thence, that we should strive to enter into it; that we should be diligent and careful in this great affair; and therefore not be discouraged by the difficulties and hardships we may meet with in it.

This remark being premised, I come now to speak more distinctly to the difficulties of religion, or hardships of a virtuous life, which are so apt to deter men from the pursuit of their duty. Toward a satisfactory account of this matter, the following method seems most suitable and proper; namely, to evince,

First, That the difficulties of a virtuous life, though acknowledged to be many and great, are yet not so formidable, as those persons represent them to themselves; but that many considerations offer, which may serve to alleviate, diminish, and take off from them.

Secondly, That were the difficulties of virtue and religion much greater than they truly are, yet this would be no just foundation for our being discouraged from the practice of them, or a reason to slacken our endeavours in the vigorous prosecution of them.

I do maintain then, in the first place, that the difficulties of a virtuous life, though acknowledged to be many and great, are not yet so formidable as those persons represent them to themselves; but that many considerations offer, which may serve to alleviate, diminish, and take off from them. and for the truth of this, I allege the following reasons:

First, we are to remember, that what our blessed Saviour declares in my text, [that *strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, that leadeth unto life,*] was delivered to his first disciples, and earliest converts, in his first sermon to them. To them indeed the gate of life was to be strait, and the way narrow. They were to attain eternal life by bitter conflicts, and severe trials.

trials. They were called to persecutions, and sufferings, and to death itself in its most frightful shapes. They were to renounce the world, and all that was dear in it, in an higher sense than is incumbent on common Christians. They were to *take up their cross*, and *follow* their Master through a sea even of their own blood; in short, they were to be made *perfect by the very sufferings* they should endure. And this it was which gave occasion to our blessed Lord's expressions, which represent the Christian's portion as a portion of hardship and severity.

But, blessed be God, this is not our case; nor are we in these circumstances. That religion, which exposed its first professors to these bitter afflictions and trials, is now become the established religion of our nation; and we have the happiness to enjoy the purity of the Christian faith, without being exposed to misery for enjoying it. Our civil rights are not invaded as a punishment for our religious tenets; but the church of Christ hath kings and queens for its nursing parents.

There is, therefore, no reason for our understanding this declaration in my text in the same strictness and severity at this time, as there was when our Saviour delivered it; it being evident, that holiness is not now so difficult, nor religion so dangerous, as it was at that time. The *gate*, (however *strait* it be) is not now so *strait*, nor the *way* so *narrow*, that *leadeth to eternal life*. This reflection will very much abate the difficulty of our state, if compared with that of the first ages of Christianity; and will let us see, that what is delivered in the holy scriptures concerning the hardships and severities attending the true Christian, does not so much agree to those ages in which we live; but was calculated, in a great measure, for the infant ages of the church, when Christians were exposed to perils scarce now to be feared or heard of.

In the second place it will very much alleviate and lessen the difficulties of a religious life, if we reflect, that these supposed difficulties are not so much in the laws of God, or in the virtues themselves, as in our thoughts and apprehensions of them. What makes holiness of life a difficulty is, that men have been already for many years engaged in vicious courses; they have indulged their appetites; have denied themselves no sensual

pleasure; have been immerfed in sin and wickedness; and from the first years of their youth have contracted habits of vice.

Indeed, when this is the case, (and it is much to be feared that this is the case of the generality of men, and especially of those who find so much difficulty in virtue,) when they are become habitually wicked, and have incautiously and rashly given themselves up to sin; it must be owned, that to such men, religion and virtue must become extremely difficult: it must be the utmost labour to them to make a change for the opposite virtues; entirely to break off their former courses, and to put themselves into a different and new way of demeanour. The Ethiopian may almost as soon *change his skin*, and the leopard his *spots*, as they learn to do well, who have been accustomed to do evil.

But if we consider it rightly, the difficulty, in such a case as this, ought not, and cannot in justice be laid at the door of virtue itself; it must not be charged on religion; but is to be ascribed (where it is justly due) to men's own infatuated choice; to the opposite vices they have contracted; and to their having given themselves up, in their unwary days, to follow the paths of evil. They are, therefore, our own depraved customs alone, that make virtue difficult; the hardships of it have arisen only from our own foolish hearts; and the ruggedness of its paths have been of our own creating.

That this is so as I have represented it, will evidently appear when we reflect that the duties to which we are obliged by religion, are in themselves very agreeable to, as well as perfective of, the nature of man. We are not enjoined any thing contrary to our native reason; but, on the contrary, all the ties we are under to holiness, are the plain dictates of nature and right reason.

We may appeal to the common sense of mankind, whether it be not more rational and natural, that we should love God, who hath so loved us; that we should worship him, who continually supports us; that we should serve him, who daily confers benefits upon us; than run into the opposite practices of hating, of disobeying, of affronting him. We may make even the enemies of virtue the judges,

judges, whether the duties relating to ourselves, such as temperance, sobriety, and chastity, be not more desirable, and more conducing to the welfare of our bodies, than the contrary habits of intemperance, gluttony, and debauchery. We may leave it to the determination even of the worst among men, whether the virtues of humanity, the duties toward our neighbour of peace and charity, of benevolence and goodwill, of candour and affability, be not infinitely preferable to the opposite vices of inhumanity, of contention, of ill-will and moroseness. From all this we may be convinced that virtue, in itself, hath none of those supposed difficulties; that holiness is perfectly agreeable to our nature and reason; that our duties lay us under nothing, that is, on its own account, burthensome to humanity; but that, if we would act agreeably to nature, in the proper sense of the expression, we must invariably pursue virtue.

Upon just grounds doth St. Paul (Romans, xii. 1.) call religion *a reasonable service*, as what, in itself, is strictly agreeable to reason. And therefore, whatever difficulties we find in it, are not justly to be imputed to religion itself, but to our own vicious habits and desires, which have rendered that holiness laborious and uneasy, which was, in its own nature, agreeable and easy.

Thirdly, The difficulties of a virtuous and religious life, will not appear so formidable, as some men represent them to themselves, if we consider, that the uneasiness and trouble which holiness gives them, is only at the first; is only at the setting out; is of short continuance, and gradually wearing away. To withdraw from all former ill habits, to shake hands with all our beloved lusts, and to bid an eternal farewell to our wickedness, does indeed require a good degree of strength and courage. But a little constancy and resolution, and undaunted perseverance, with a manly and generous fortitude, will soon get the mastery of sin within us.

As we advance in virtue, our evil habits will continually grow weaker; as we increase in goodness, every temptation to sin will be less powerful and cogent. The habits of vice will with ease give way to the growing habits of virtue. The cords, with which we are now tied down, will be slackened; and the whole

man be insensibly turned to the practice of what, before, seemed little less to him than impossible. The reluctances and aversions to religion will be but of short duration to such as set out with fixed and settled purposes of amendment. The fury of the battle is all discharged at the first onset; and, if we once repel the enemy, the victory may easily be ensured to us. A little time, and a continued resolution, will render us absolute masters of the field. Faint and languid will be the future assaults of sin; and disabled those forces which have been once broken. An heroic attempt then, is the most necessary part in this spiritual warfare.

The timorous beginner surveys from the shore the sea with amazement. But when his advanced years and manly courage have once engaged him in the service, he insults those waves which created him so much terror. The like is our conflict in the cause of virtue. The hardship is only in the first brunt. If we once get over this, we shall be altogether as easy in an habitual conformity to godliness, as any one can possibly be supposed to be in the indulgence of his pleasures. The service of God we shall find to be perfect freedom; and will experimentally convince us of the truth of what Solomon hath long ago declared, that the *ways of religion are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace.*

Fourthly, The unreasonableness of men's laying so much weight and stress on the difficulties attending a good life, will from hence appear, that in all probability the very same excuse would have been made, and the same plea have been urged by them, had the difficulties been much less than now they are. Had salvation been attainable upon much easier terms than it is, had our obligations to virtue been much slighter than now they are; had God given us a larger liberty to gratify our desires, yet it is much to be feared, that the same men would have thought even then the burthen too great, and obligation too heavy.

The same laziness of temper, the same weak aversions to any thing that is troublesome, and the same indolence and carelessness, would undoubtedly have moved them still to complain of hardships. The busy enemy of mankind would, even in these circumstances, have suggested

suggested to us the same unreasonable pretences as he now does; he would have whispered in our ears the severity of God's proceedings with us; and have represented God to our imaginations as an Egyptian-task-master. This would, questionless, have been the continued complaint of the same men, who think at this time the terms of religion too difficult and laborious: for where the same causes are, the same effects must constantly flow from them.

Fifthly and lastly, That the difficulties of a virtuous life are not so formidable as they have been represented, will from hence appear, that the great duties of religion do mutually promote and forward each other. The attainment of one virtue is easily followed by the attainment of a second; and this again naturally leads to a third; and that facilitates the introduction of another: for it is worth our observation, that the virtues of a good life have a fixed connection with, and dependence on each other; are as it were linked together in a chain; are of the nearest and most intimate relation each to each, and in their practice scarcely to be separated.

Thus, for instance, the great duty of justice, when habitually attained, easily prepares the way to an extensive charity; which indeed, in its most remarkable instance, is little more than justice to the poor. Charity, thus attained, naturally opens the gate to humanity towards all men; to liberality and to hospitality; and these are succeeded by universal benevolence; a love of our whole kind; by general peace and quiet amongst men.

So again, in our duties towards God; when we are once arrived at that principal duty of loving him, this love will naturally break out in a desire to imitate him; in the humility of worshipping and adoring him; in a strict obedience to his commands, and a fear of displeasing or affronting him. Thus, you see, there is a certain gradation in the great duties of life. The one still paves the way for another; and so, the attainment of a few, naturally disposes us to all the rest.

And, as the virtues are thus connected with, and followed by each other, so is there the same growing easiness in the

conquest over vice. The subduing one vicious habit easily produces the mastery of another; and the same strength which enabled us to get the ascendant over one lust, will (if vigorously applied) be sufficient to conquer all the rest; for this is certain, that there is no greater difficulty in subduing one than another; at least, where they are of the same kind, and subduable in the same way.

In a word, by the close and intimate connection which there is between the several virtues, and by the mutual dependence and gradation observable in the several vices, the transition from the practice of one duty to that of another is easy and smooth; as, on the other hand, the subduing one vicious appetite as naturally enables men to subdue another; and by this means, the difficulties of an holy life are greatly diminished, and the attainment of virtue appears not so laborious as men fancy.

From these five remarks, the truth of the first general head of this discourse is evinced; I go on now, in the second place, to shew, that were the difficulties of virtue and religion much greater than they truly are, yet this would be no just foundation for our being discouraged from the practice of them, or a reason to slacken our endeavours in the vigorous prosecution of them. The proof of this I shall in like manner attempt, by the following arguments:

First, Be the difficulties of holiness never so great, nay were they much greater than the apprehensions and fears of men represent them, the proper use we should make of this, is, not to sit down in despair of success, but to use the greater industry and application in endeavouring to surmount them. Because there are hardships to be met with in our way to heaven, and the paths which lead to it are rough, shall we therefore be content to lose it; or shall we meanly give up our title and claim to it? Shall we always continue under a disease, and never endeavour the restoration of our health, because the medicine is unpalatable and bitter to our taste? No certainly: the inference we are to draw from hence is, not to undervalue the rewards of another world so much, as to throw up our hopes of them, purely because we will not be at the pains to gain them; but rather, in good

good earnest to set to our strength, that at length we may subdue the difficulties which oppose us; that we may conquer those evil inclinations which separate between us and our supreme good; and shew that we do, in some sort, deserve the rewards of the conquest, by our resolution in gaining it.

I have already observed, that this is the use which our great Master made of the consideration before us. When he told us, that *strait is the gate that leadeth unto life*, he did not urge this to discourage his followers; but, on the contrary, he commanded them the more earnestly to strive to enter into it.

This also he exemplified to us in his own person. He *through much tribulation* entered into his kingdom; and we his followers must come after him in the same way. The difficulties he met with were vastly superior to any of those which we encounter: and as the kingdom of heaven is capable of suffering violence, so they who would inherit it, must *take it* (as our blessed Lord expresses himself) *by violence and force*.

Secondly, Though the hardships of a religious life were greater than they are, yet this ought not to slacken us in, or deter us from, a vigorous prosecution of it; because, the greater are the difficulties, the more illustrious will be the victory. The glory of an heroic action always rises in proportion to the danger we underwent in performing it; and that man deserves the most lasting praises, who hath done most to reap them. They are only the timorous, the dastardly, the pusillanimous, who shrink back from appearing danger, and are afraid of every difficulty before them; but the stout and generous heart will pursue its aims through any terrors which may oppose it.

On what a narrowness of soul is this dread of the difficulties to be met with in virtue founded; and from what a cowardice of spirit doth it take its rise? The Christian religion is far from inspiring us with such mean and low imaginations; but would infuse into our thoughts more noble sentiments. Our faith teaches us to be bold and enterprising; *To put on the whole armour of God; after having done all to stand; and to follow the Captain of our salvation, who was made perfect through suffering*. Let

not those therefore, who call themselves Christians, betray such unmanly fears; apprehensions so much beneath the spirit of their religion, and dignity of their character.

In the third place, Though the difficulties of virtue were ever so many, yet when we reflect on the greatness of the reward which is hereafter to attend it, we shall be convinced, that it was in no wise fitting that so vast an happiness should be conferred on us, without some previous conflicts, some sharp trials. So exquisite are the joys of heaven, so transcendent the bliss of saints hereafter, that it seems incongruous to bestow them on those, who should do nothing toward the attainment of them. So cheap a victory would give less pleasure to the conqueror after it is won; and were men put in possession of heaven without any preceding severities, the very joys which it offers would suffer some sort of abatement; because the hardships we go through for the attainment of an end, will give a relish and gust to the pleasure of attaining it. It is the dearest bought victory which gives the greatest satisfaction; and men are never so sensible of the satisfaction of being safe at home, as when they have escaped the most threatening dangers abroad.

To this we may add, that our life here being none other than a state of probation, and a necessary prelude to that hereafter, it cannot otherwise happen, but we must give proofs of our courage, and expect, in order to it, the assaults of our most vigorous enemies. All this arises from the very notion of a state of probation; because, without it, this can be no state of probation at all. But let us look forward to *the prize of the mark of our high calling*; let us duly meditate on that joy which is set before us; and when this glorious prospect hath filled our imaginations, the difficulties of pursuing it will immediately vanish. We shall then be satisfied, *that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us*. Rom. viii. 18.

Fourthly, Though the hardships of a religious life were allowed to be greater than they are, yet this would be no just foundation for our being discouraged from attempting it; because, the practice

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tice of vice, and the going on in a course of sin, is attended with no fewer nor less difficulties than the practice of virtue.

Even sin hath its hardships, and its service is perfect slavery. And therefore, no prudent or considerate man would choose to decline a virtuous life upon account of its difficulties, when those, which a sinful course draws on, are no less weighty. If sin hath its troubles and uneasinesses as well as holiness, and if both be not without their respective burthens; let us, by the rules of common sense, make choice of that way which will make us happy at last; and not of that which will create to us equal uneasiness here, and make us eternally miserable hereafter.

It would be sufficient to affirm here, that vice hath its difficulties as well as virtue: but I shall not content myself with this; I shall not scruple to aver, (and so must the sinner himself, if he would speak out his sentiments,) that there are in reality fewer difficulties in virtue than in sin; that it will cost us less trouble to subdue our evil appetites than to gratify them; and that it is easier to maintain the mastery over them, than to bear a subjection to them.

We affirm then, that sin treats us in a severer manner than the most rigid virtue does. For what a variety of craving appetites doth the sinner entertain; each of which must be satisfied, or immediately its calls become louder and more importunate. Thus is even the youngest sinner, and he who is but just entered on a vicious course, hurried on and distracted. But how much more miserable is the condition of those who are become habitually wicked? In them the appetites of sin, having been long indulged, are still more headstrong and troublesome; the having gratified them so frequently, makes it more difficult to deny, or to withstand them; and so the wretch becomes confirmed in that slavery to which he hath foolishly sold himself. Such is his condition, even whilst he hath the power and opportunity of gratification.

But this will not always prove the case. Time, age, or the accidents of life, will make it impossible for him to go on in this course always; for no man is either so powerful as to have every enjoyment he may be fond of within his reach; or if he were, yet sickness or age

may disable him from pursuing it. And yet the irregular desires still remain in him, and in the event prove the sorest punishments to themselves.

Add to this, that the sinner hath not only a vast variety of wicked desires, which constantly torture him, but (which is worse) they are often known to clash and interfere with each other; they draw the sinner quite different ways; and so to gratify one, he must cross and disappoint another.

Thus, if covetousness bids him be saving in his expences, on the other hand his sensuality makes great demands, and cannot be indulged but at a considerable charge: if his pride commands him to set a value on himself, and to despise others; yet to serve his ambition he must condescend to court and fawn on his inferiors. The like may be observed in numberless other instances; from whence it will appear, that he who gives himself up to his vices, can reap no real satisfaction; since the pleasure which is drawn from the gratification of one appetite, is more than overbalanced by the violence which is thereby offered to another.

Fifthly, and to have done: That there are difficulties in an holy life, ought not to discourage us from pursuing it; because, however severe they may be, yet God hath promised us the all-powerful assistance and grace of his Holy Spirit. We have the security of his own word, (in which respect he cannot possibly deny himself,) that *he will not suffer us to be tempted above what we are able; but will, with the temptation, make a way to escape, that we may be able to bear it.*

This *his grace is sufficient for us*; and therefore, whatever inclinations our depraved natures may have to vice, this assistance of the Holy Spirit will enable us to correct them; for he knoweth our frame, and considers our condition, and will always proportion his aids to the occasions we have for them.

Sin, saith St. Paul, shall no more have dominion over us; because we are not now under the law, but under grace: which words, though intended by the apostle for another purpose, may be equally applied to this. Nor can this be doubted, if we consider, either the infinite purity of the person who assists us, or the infinite power employed on the occasion. And therefore the same apostle, (conscious of this inward

inward grace,) in another place thus triumphs, *I can do all things through Christ who strengtheneth me*; and again, *The strength of God is made perfect in weakness*. Let us not then complain of the difficulties of religion; let us not turn back in the day of battle; nor dishonourably retreat, whilst, supported by such assistance, we have already the assurance and earnest of the victory.

Upon the whole, the timorous Christian will from this discourse find, that the difficulties of holiness are not so great as he imagines; and, if they were much greater, yet that he ought not to be discouraged from the pursuit of it. Virtue and religion, when set in their true light, and represented in their proper colours, have nothing in them frightful; they are all lovely, and engaging. It is one of the most subtle devices of our crafty adversary, to describe religion to us under a disagreeable form; and to paint vice as pleasant and delightful. But those who are not in love with falsehood, will draw off the mask, and discern things as they truly are. Then will they see virtue in all its graces, and vice in its native horror and deformity; and then will they be thoroughly persuaded of what the royal psalmist affirms, that *sweet are God's laws unto our taste, yea sweeter than honey to our mouth*.

S E R M O N XCIX.

By HENRY STEBBING, D. D.

Senior Prebendary of Wilts, &c.

Sobriety and Vigilance recommended.

I PETER, v. 8.

Be sober, be vigilant, because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh up and down, seeking whom he may devour.

THE duties here recommended, sobriety and vigilance, stand related to each other as the means to the end. We are therefore to be vigilant, that we may be sober; which implies, that without care and circumspection in the government of ourselves, we shall be in great danger of being overcome by temptations. So it follows in the reason assigned in the latter part of the verse, *your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion,*

walketh up and down, seeking whom he may devour. The devil is our adversary, as he is the enemy to our souls, which, by enticing us to sin against God, he sends to everlasting perdition. And to shew us our danger from this grand enemy, he is here represented to us under the image of a fierce and ravenous beast, prolling up and down for his prey, and seizing and grinding to pieces with his teeth the helpless and unwary. This is the plain meaning of the text. Now, for our instruction, I purpose in the first place to shew what sort of conduct it is which is here termed sobriety; and what are those considerations which recommend and enforce it as fitting and becoming to reasonable creatures: and then, in the next place, I shall shew wherein principally consists that prudence and circumspection which is necessary to secure us against temptations, and is here expressed by the word vigilance.

The word sobriety, in its most common acceptation, signifies that branch of moral virtue which consists in the due regulation of our fleshly appetites, that is, of those appetites which are common to men and brutes. Appetite excites to something which is necessary to our present preservation; as for instance, the appetite to eat and to drink. But as it is evident from fact and experience, that it is not a thing indifferent to the body in what degree or measure a man eats or drinks, as there is in these cases a too little and a too much; there must likewise be a mean between these two extremes, and this mean will be what we term sobriety in these respects.

Man is born the subject of God, and lives under his law and government; the necessary consequence of which is, that in the use of every power and faculty which he hath given us, we should have an eye to the ends of his providence in bestowing them. What agrees with these ends is naturally right. What thwarts or contradicts them is naturally wrong, and makes us transgressors of his law, and contemners of his sovereign authority. God gave us life that we might each of us fill up the part assigned us in the general system of things; and therefore we are not at liberty to throw it away as we please, but are bound to uphold it to the utmost of our power. He hath appointed our food to be the sustenance of

life,

life, and when we eat and drink to our health and refreshment, we use it properly: but to eat or to drink to the impairing our health, that is, to the destruction of life, is an abuse of his creatures, and little differs from self-murder. For what difference does it make, if a man shortens his days and dies before his time, whether he does it by frequent debauches or by a glass of poison? You will answer perhaps, that in the one case the mischief is intended; in the other not. But this is not always true, and perhaps it is very seldom so. A man may not indulge himself in an intemperate way of living, with direct intention to kill himself: the first thing in view in such cases is, for the most part, merely to please the appetite. But what then? Are we to learn nothing from experience and observation? If we are to learn any thing, we have warning sufficient from what we every day see, that the natural tendency of intemperance is to destroy health, and shorten life; and the mischief therefore must be virtually intended: for he that chooses an act, chooses it with all its known or probable consequences. This should more especially be urged upon those who feel the beginnings of the mischief within themselves, and yet will not refrain; which is frequently the case. Nature gives us many kindly warnings, if we are wise enough to take notice of them: and if we will not, the sin and the mischief will lie at our doors.

Under this circumstance then it is evident, that the sin of intemperance is an act of disloyalty to God. Take it in another light, and it will be injustice towards men. Our duty towards God and towards one another are so closely linked together, that he that transgresseth one commonly transgresseth both. In the present case, if a man destroys himself by intemperance, he deprives his family and his dependants of their natural support, which is many times a very great and cruel act of injustice. A like offence it is, when by the expensiveness of this vice men leave their families beggars, or disable themselves from discharging their just dues to those with whom they are concerned in traffic and commerce. Nay, suppose that a man keeps clear of the law; that he can satisfy his creditors; maintain himself and those who depend upon him, without being burdensome to

others; still he may be unjust in a lower sense of injustice. For out of every superfluity something is due to our families, something to our country, something to our friends, something to the poor and needy. How much precisely is due to each, discretion must determine. But this we may lay down as a general rule; that we can call nothing absolutely our own, but what is necessary to answer the reasonable purposes of life. All that is wasted extravagantly is spent unfaithfully; for it is a drawback upon somebody or other, who ought to have been the better for it.

As intemperance draws along with it great expence of money, so it is also a great devourer of time. And if those who are addicted to this vice would seriously consider with themselves, to how much better purposes they might apply that leisure which is spent in idle conversation; they would see great cause to be ashamed of their conduct. There is no man so insignificant but that he may, in some respect or other, be useful to the world; and every man is bound to be so in a manner and measure suitable to his station and abilities. As sociable creatures we have all of us need of each other; and life would be a most insipid and uncomfortable thing, were it not for the mutual exercise of good turns. This is the great cement of friendship; the peculiar happiness, as it is the peculiar distinction, of reasonable creatures. Now intemperance deprives us, not only of the opportunities of doing good offices, but frequently even of the capacity for it. For a man in such cases is capable, by his skill, by his activity and dexterity in business; all which suppose a natural good understanding improved by use and exercise in the laudable occupations of life. But voluptuousness begets in us a habit of indolence, and loses us almost wholly in ourselves: and when intemperance grows to that degree of excess as to impair the body, it usually weakens the force and vigour of the mind, and makes us as unable to contrive as we are to execute. How many are the miserable examples of those, who, by their natural endowments and the advantages of their situation, seem to have been intended by Providence for great matters, who have yet, by their debauched and sordid lives, utterly disqualified

lified themselves from being in any degree useful either in a public or private capacity! To behave in this manner shews not only a want of virtue, but a want of common sense; for it is sacrificing to brutal appetite that esteem which the world is always ready to pay as a just tribute to good and beneficial actions, and making ourselves the jest and scorn of mankind. As there is nothing so useless as a sot, so there is no character which so certainly, and so deservedly, exposes men to contempt; which would be a mortifying consideration, if they were able to reflect. But the truth is, sensual indulgence spoils us for reflection, as it does for every thing else; which makes the case so much the worse, as it makes it the more desperate.

And this suggests another reason to shew the mischievous nature of this vice, which is, that it unqualifies us for intellectual improvements, the much better half of human good. The beasts have nothing to do but to eat and to drink, and to follow appetite. And if we, though by our natural gifts qualified for more noble ends, will mind nothing else; wherein, I beseech you, do we differ from them? But is it no offence, think we, if, when God hath made us men, we degrade ourselves into brutes? Is this answering the ends of his providence? If God hath given us reason, he gave it us for something; and what is so proper a use of reason, as the improvement of reason? What is there that can minister such solid lasting satisfaction to the nature of man? The pleasures of the body are not only apt to cloy and lose their relish by frequent use, but are many times attended with uneasy consequences. But the pleasures of the mind suffer no abatement by the enjoyment of them. Every acquisition in knowledge sharpens the appetite after new inquiries, which are always new entertainments. Every improvement in virtue leaves us more and more satisfied with ourselves: and when we meet with those returns from mankind, which are due to our merit (which in one way or another will seldom fail us) we have all the happiness in possession that this world can give us. But this is all lost to a sensual voluptuous man, who, wasting his time in a useless unthinking way, knows little beyond what he feels; nor feels any thing that can give him

comfort, but what his horse or his dog feels (perhaps) with a quicker sense than he.

It is scarce needful for me to observe to you, that what has been offered upon the sin of drunkenness will, in the main, hold against her almost constant companion, the sin of whoredom; and if more might be said, it will, perhaps, best suit the decency of this place, to pass it over in silence. I go on then to what I proposed in the second part of this discourse, viz. to shew wherein principally consists that prudence and circumspection, which is necessary to secure us against the temptations to both, and which is here expressed by the word vigilance.

Vigilance hath reference to danger; and our danger threatens from ourselves or others. From ourselves, as we have naturally the motions of appetite within us, and may not always be careful to correct their first irregularities, or to avoid those occasions which are apt to lead us to excess. In these two points principally consists the prudence of a man; to check the very first beginnings of vice, and never suffer our passions to grow upon us by use and indulgence. Our passions as God gave us them, are within the controul of reason: leave them to themselves, and they will acquire a strength beyond what is natural; and then reason may be too weak to govern them. No excess therefore, though ever so small, should be neglected; for small excesses, by being often repeated, will grow into great ones; and what a very little pains would have corrected at first, by being neglected, may grow to be insuperable. It is thus in the body: little ails grow into mortals diseases; the peccant humours spreading themselves like leaven, and tainting the whole constitution. It is the same thing as to the mind; where there is a perpetual conflict between reason and appetite, and the passions are always working to get themselves more scope and liberty. When sin is repeated we seldom stop exactly at the same point. One act of excess usually improves upon another, the appetite upon every indulgence growing more eager and importunate. Whenever we observe this in ourselves, (which we shall very quickly do,) there is but one safe course for us left, which is, to take up a firm and steady resolution, and break off all at once; for there

there is no knowing how far the next sin may carry us. When men have been long habituated to vicious courses, this may not be always practicable. In such cases they must do as when they are deeply run in debt; get out by degrees as well as they are able. But if a man's stock is equal to it, it is always best to keep a clear reckoning; and this is the case at first setting out; for though the natural strength of a passion is not the same in all tempers and constitutions, it is always so proportioned to the other powers of the mind, that no man is left under a necessity of being vicious. It may be hard to abstain, and will be so more or less, as the passions are naturally weaker or stronger; but it is not a thing impossible if we will resolve upon it heartily.

But here lies the main difficulty; so to resolve as to not unresolve again, when the next occasions of sin offer themselves. When a man has been guilty of an act of intemperance, and comes coolly to reflect upon what he has done, it is an easy matter for him to make good resolutions, and he will naturally do so, if he has any sense of virtue; but we see by numberless instances, that when the sober fit wears off, and the gaiety of men's spirits throws them a little off their guard, such resolutions are very apt to end in nothing. When this is found to be the case, the rule of prudence is plain and easy. Cut off those occasions so far as you are able. So Solomon advises, Prov. xxiii. 31. *Look not thou upon the wine when it is red, when it giveth its colour in the cup, when it moveth itself aright; at last it biteth like a serpent, and stingeth like an adder.* So Eccclus. ix. 7, 8. *Look not round about thee in the streets, neither wander thou in the solitary places thereof; turn away thine eye from a beautiful woman; look not upon another's beauty—for here-with love is kindled as a fire.* The occasions of sin are not absolutely to be avoided, what care soever we may take. The world is full of them. Where-soever we go, how-soever we may be employed, they haunt and intrude themselves upon us. They follow us in our most secret retirements: for we may be our own tempters, and the heart may sin whilst the body is undefiled. But these are not the things that make the great havock of human virtues. They are occasions wilfully sought and deliberately indulged; such as the frequenting places of public resort,

where nothing is driving on but mirth and gaiety: where the ear is caught by unchaste speeches, the eye by light or immodest representations; where virtue is ridiculed, and vice dressed out in artificial colourings to hide its deformities, and heighten whatever in it there may be that is tempting and ensnaring. Persons that set a due value upon their virtues should void such places as they would a pest-house: it is like breathing an unwholesome and infected air. The mischief may not presently shew itself; but it leaves those impressions upon the mind, that future incidents may ripen up into very fatal mistakes in conduct.

From those dangers which arise from ourselves, by the neglecting to watch against the beginnings of vice, and cutting off the occasions of sin; I come now to consider those which threaten from others. The text only mentions our great adversary *the Devil*, who, *as a roaring lion, walketh up and down, seeking whom he may devour*. I shall not enter into speculations about the nature and operations of evil spirits, and their intercourse with mankind. (See Boyle's Lecture, p. 216, &c.) If you will believe your bible, (and if you will not, you will not believe me,) *Sin is of the Devil*; which should give us a dreadful idea of it; for he is our enemy, and means our destruction. It is for this reason, I presume, that the wisdom of God hath thought fit to acquaint us with the agency of the Devil in this case; to instruct us, that, in how plausible a light soever vice may represent itself to us, it is nevertheless a stream issuing forth from the first bitter source of all our woes; and that, pleasing as the bait may be, it carries death in its bowels.

As the Devil tempted at first by his agents or instruments, so he does now. The serpent beguiled Eve, she her husband. And thus one bad man corrupts another, either by his bad example, or by his evil conversation, or by both. Bad company may be avoided, and must be avoided if we mean well to ourselves; for can a man *touch pitch* and not be *defiled*? Eccclus. xxxi. 1. But there is no such thing as avoiding bad examples. When I chuse a bad companion, it is my own act. When a bad example is set me, it is another's act; and when the act is public and notorious, it is not in my power

to say, "I will not see it, I will not know it." The work of Christian prudence therefore, in this case, cannot be to remove the example; but to fortify ourselves by such considerations as may be proper to defeat its influence.

Example has in all cases, generally, a great weight in determining the conduct of men. In some cases it is right it should be so; in others it is wrong; and to shew you the true distinction between these cases, it will be necessary to consider what it is that gives to example its proper force.

Every man's conduct is ordinarily presumed to be the transcript of his mind or deliberate judgment; and a man's judgment weighs more or less according to the opinion we have of his wisdom. When madmen or fools do extravagant or ridiculous things, we do not make them our examples, because we consider them not as the effects of a reasonable judgment; which is proof beyond all contradiction, that example so far, and so far only, weighs with reasonable men, as it may be presumed to be the result of wisdom; and in cases where we have not light enough to direct ourselves, the example of others, of whose wisdom and integrity we are reasonably persuaded, will be the best rule we have to go by. It is upon this principle that we trust physicians with our lives, and lawyers with our estates: and it is upon the same principle, perhaps, that many will trust nobody with the direction of their consciences; because they think themselves very well qualified to be their own directors. Men may mistake in this point no doubt, and often do. But so far as the premises are right, so far this conclusion is certainly so; for why should one man make use of another man's eyes, when he has eyes of his own that will see as well?

But we should take care to be consistent in this principle, and pursue it steadily, as well in those things which cross our appetites as in those which sooth and flatter them. If there is any point in which a man may trust his own judgment, it is in discerning the natural distinction between good and evil. All men have capacity for this, till their understandings have been tampered with, and debauched by bad practices. Every man, when he sets out in the world, comes under a prepossession, that whoredom and drunken-

ness are bad things. It is the common sense of mankind. And if you with your own eyes see and know these things to be wrong, what avails it to you, if hundreds should act as if they were indifferent matters? A man's example, as I said before, is at best but his judgment; in the present case it is not always even that, nor perhaps often. When we see men allowing themselves in vicious courses, we are not presently to infer that they act upon principle. We may see the turpitude of vice, and yet practise it. When men, wise and cautious in the main of their conduct, are observed to be faulty in some particular instances, we are ready enough to presume, that they see those actions, in which they are faulty, in a more favourable light than we do; which takes off a good deal from the abhorrence of such actions, in proportion to the value we set upon the example. This is a good reason why we should be very careful not to set bad examples; but it is not a reason why we should be in haste to take them; for the conclusion is not safe. There are none so wise, that we may venture to take their examples in the gross. All men have their weaknesses; and the greatest weakness of all, I think, is, when we suffer ourselves to be influenced by mere presumptions of what others may think or judge, whilst we have a sure guide within our own breasts, that will not deceive us, if we consult it impartially.

But suppose it were spoke out ever so plainly, that there is no harm in following appetite. The question will still be, what regard is due to it. Reason has prescribed to appetite its certain bounds. The gospel confirms what reason teaches, and bids us to be sober and temperate: to *flee fornication*, 1 Cor. vi. 18.; and that every Christian *should know how to possess his vessel in sanctification and honour, not in the lust of concupiscence*, Thess. iv. 6. Go into some companies, and perhaps you will hear all this disputed; and the gospel set forth as laying hard and unreasonable restraints upon the natural liberties of men. But who are they that read such lessons? Are they the sober, the temperate, and the chaste? No; they are the licentious and the incontinent. No man attempts to corrupt another's principle, till he is debauched himself. And do such as these deserve your regard in these

these points? Should not their advice always be received with strong suspicions of partiality? When the minister of your parish preaches to you *righteousness, temperance, and a judgment to come*, you are apt to slight him, and say, it is his trade. But if a rake or a sot gives you a lecture of vice, to him you will listen. But why? Is there any thing more any man's trade, than promoting wickedness is the trade of bad men? He that falls in with a bad man in his vicious ways, offers a high compliment to his judgment; for it is treating him as if he were wiser than parents, and lawgivers, and even than God himself. Besides, when a man justifies vice in another, he justifies it in himself; a consideration of no small weight; for there are a great many who are well enough contented to be known to be debauchees, who would be loth to pass with the world for madmen or fools.

These are the reasons which should always lead us to suspect the evil counsels of bad men: they have a plain interest in the case. To consult with lewd company about sobriety and temperance, is like advising with highwaymen and pick-pockets about honesty and justice. But the shorter and the better way will be to stop your ears against such counsellors as these, and have no fellowship with them. For intimacy and familiarity with bad men give them opportunities to offer those trials to our virtues, which no wise man should ever hazard. A wicked companion watches our unguarded moments, and falls upon us by surprize, when we are under no preparation to make our defence. When the heart is made merry with wine; when the mind lays aside its severity, and is worked up into a gay and easy posture by wit and raillery; then every thing comes unsuspected, and passes without scrutiny. And then perhaps it is that we are at first enticed to commit actual sin; which these artists know how to represent in some softening light, to those who cannot yet bear a direct attack upon their religious principles. Consider now the danger you are in, when once a breach is made upon your virtue. The mind uneasy upon the next cool reflection! The appetite sharpened by the taste of new and unexperienced pleasures! Reason pulling one way, and passion driving another!—Under this struggle of mind, when the balance is brought near to an

equal poise, a little matter will turn the scale; and the ear, prepared to receive smooth and flattering advice, will greedily imbibe whatever is offered in disparagement of religion; and when once principle is gone, virtue will have lost all ground to stand upon. He that acts against conscience may repent; but he that sins without conscience is lost beyond recovery.

S E R M O N C.

By the Rev. DR. LUCAS;

Vicar of Coleman-street.

The Influence of Conversation, with Rules for it.

PROV. xiii. 20.

He that walketh with wise men shall be wise; but a companion of fools shall be destroyed.

CONVERSATION has ever justly been accounted a powerful instrument of good or evil; it has ever had a mighty influence on the conduct of human life; and the vice or virtue of the world has ever, in a great measure, been owing to it. The regulation, therefore, of it, did in all ages demand the utmost prudence and caution; but surely in none more, than in this of ours. Now, if ever, it is necessary for us to exhort all that have a concern for their own souls, to shun the way of the sinner, and refrain their feet from the path of the wicked. Now, if ever, it is necessary for us to exhort all that fear the Lord, to unite and combine themselves for the defence of his honour, for the security of their own souls, and, if it be possible, for the giving a check to sin, and propagating holiness, in this impious generation. For now the number and confidence of sinners increase daily; atheism and profaneness spread like a leprosy; there is nothing in example, nothing in discourse, that speaks us Christians; we seem to have quitted not only the morals, but the principles of the gospel; and have degenerated so far from the modesty, purity, sanctity, and dignity of christian conversation, that the least air of seriousness and gravity, begins to look singular and unfashionable: so that, what is worst of all, whilst the wicked publish their sin as Sodom, and hide it not, religion seems to want assurance, to distrust its own cause,

and to be in a manner out of countenance, every-where, but in the closet and the temple; and we are in danger in a little while, to see men more ashamed of virtue than of vice. These are the reflections which determine me to this subject. There is nothing obscure in the text; I am only to mind you, that wisdom and goodness, folly and sin, are terms equivalent in the language of the scripture, and particularly of this book of Proverbs: and that to make up the antithesis or opposition between the two parts of this verse entire and full, we must read it thus; *He that keeps company with the virtuous and good, will himself be virtuous and happy: but he that keeps company with the vicious, will be vicious and miserable.* The text, then, contains these two propositions:

I. That men generally become such as the company they keep.

II. That happiness is the natural result or the fruit of holiness, and misery of sin.

I will therefore, first, insist on each of these doctrines; and then give you two or three rules for our due conduct, in reference to society.

I. That men are generally such as their acquaintance and familiars are. This is affirmed in my text no less with reference to good than bad company. There is one general and plain reason for this; all men are naturally lovers of themselves, and therefore the most effectual way of endearing and obliging one another, is by mutual respects and compliances; no man can make his court more effectually to another, than by falling in with him in opinion and practice, approving his judgment, and observing his inclinations; this is that which flatters our self-love, the predominant principle in our natures; this is that which renders society agreeable, and friendship lasting; which is never to be hoped for, where men's principles and humours are inconsistent and incompatible: ere we can be pleased ourselves, or please others, we must be mutually fashioned and moulded into an agreement and conformity of principles and morals, we must be acted and governed by the same affections and inclinations, and moved and led by the same desires and passions. This is so far the universal sense of mankind, that it has escaped no one's observation; all act and judge by this rule; we estimate men by

the intimacies they maintain; and he is thought to have forfeited all pretension to good sense, or good breeding, who does not stifle those sentiments, and suppress those inclinations which are apt to shock the company he is in, or give any disturbance or disgust to his friends. From hence the proposition laid down follows with undeniable evidence, That men are generally such as their companions are: for that society will soon be dissolved, where we reap no satisfaction from it; and we can reap none where there is no agreement in our notions and inclinations.

But that this truth, which is of the highest consequence, may be the more deeply imprinted, I will proceed to a more distinct and particular illustration of it. And first, of the influence good company has on us towards making us wise and good. There are two things in wise men, which never fail to work upon their friends and acquaintance: first, good discourse; secondly, good examples.

First, then, as to good discourse; how manifest is the tendency of this? What light, what strength, what pleasure does it minister? How does it awaken the conscience, and purify the heart? How does it quicken us when we languish? How does it recall and reduce us, when we begin to forget ourselves, and lay aside a wise sobriety of mind and holy fear? How does it raise us when we sink and grovel, and how often does it kindle in us wise desires, and holy purposes? Thus Solomon observes, *That the lips of the wise disperse knowledge*, Prov. xv. 7.; and the New Testament tells us, concerning this kind of discourse, that it *ministers grace to the hearer*; that it *edifies and builds us up in our holy faith*: and the disciples going to Emmaus, remark what life and spirit there was in the conversation of our Lord, *Did not our hearts burn within us, while he talked to us on the way, and while he opened to us the scriptures?* Luke, xxiv. 32. Now, though no words can ever be impregnated with the same force and energy with which our Lord's were; yet, certainly, when God, and our great Mediator, when the riches of divine grace, when righteousness and heaven are the subject of our discourse, when our language flows from the heart, and is animated by a vital and experimental sense of that we talk of, when it has all the advantages which a true

true friendship and a known integrity, and the most favourable opportunities can give it; such discourse can never fail of moving and affecting us.

From discourse I pass on to example: and here, it is certain, that virtue never appears so beautiful and lovely, as in action; that it is represented with much more life, in the practice of a wise and good man, than it can be in rules and precepts; that the notions we form of duty from the lives of others, are generally more correct and just, than those which we form, even from the scriptures themselves; for we are apt to bend and accommodate the rule a little in favour of ourselves, but we never do so in favour of others: that the excellencies and perfections of a friend, are very strong incitements to emulation, and very sensible reproofs of our remissness, and comparative barrenness and unprofitableness; and on the other side, his defects are excellent lessons of caution and watchfulness. It is, lastly, certain, that whatever beauty and loveliness there can be in virtue, it receives a new accession from the example of a friend, whose integrity I know; and the esteem and affection I have for him, is apt to beget in me a value for every thing he approves, and inclines me to be pleased with what he does. But these arguments are too many and too copious to be dwelt on; I content myself therefore only to have mentioned them, and will lay before you but this one single consideration. A good life in a companion, is certainly a mighty motive and encouragement to us; for while we behold our friends discharging the parts of good christians, we see in them not only what we ought to do, but what we may do. Whatever is possible to them, is possible to us too; for they are clad with the same frailties and passions, exposed to the same temptations, and have no other assistances than what we have, or may have. In them we have plain demonstration of the truth and power of religion; we can no longer imagine that faith is a mere speculation or amusement, or virtue a mere pretence or name; under these convictions we shall either come to a resolution ourselves to do our duty, or shall suffer the daily reproaches of our own minds. This is the natural influence of example; it instructs, it reproves, exhorts, and if it do not prevail, it con-

demns. Thus St. Paul, Heb. xii. 1. *Wherefore, being compassed about with such a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin that does so easily beset us; and let us run with patience the race that is set before us.* Where the apostle plainly teaches us, that if the faith and patience of martyrs and confessors do not move us to imitate their virtues, they will certainly serve to upbraid or condemn us at the last day. And certainly the examples of the living, and those our familiars and friends, cannot but have as much force and power in them, as those of the dead; nay, much more, for the reasons I have already suggested. Will not our own hearts be apt to reason thus with us on every reflection we make on the virtues of our friend? What am I doing? Can he and I go to the same place at last? He pursues a crown by works of faith, and shall I obtain it by works of darkness? He seeks a heaven by the labour of love, and the patience of hope; and shall I gain it by sloth and idleness, by sensuality and looseness? He mortifies the body, while I indulge it; he prays and contends, and passes his life in holy fear, while I am careless and unconcerned about a future state. His conduct is regular, his discourse heavenly, the bent of his soul is toward that which is good: but how little do I mind these things! How hard is it for me not to let him see that I am wholly set upon the pleasures and profits of this world! What do I mean? Am I indeed in the right, and he in the wrong? is religion, indeed, but a well-devised fable? Alas! I see the contrary. I see that there is truth and reason on his side; I cannot but reverence him, and think him happy; I cannot but own that he follows his reason, I my lust and fancy. How uneasy these kind of soliloquies must be, and how naturally they will end, either in the reforming our follies, or in breaking off and quitting a conversation which gives us so much trouble, you cannot but see.

I have done with the influence of good company. I am next to consider that of bad. This subject, after what I have in general said, does not require long insisting on. Daily experience is too plain, too sad a proof of this truth, that sin is catching and infectious: that human nature is so prone to evil, that it needs very little temptation or encouragement to it:

that ill principles and practices are soon propagated; and if they find any countenance and approbation from those we converse with, they will easily bear down all the opposition which the modesty of a civil education, the weak impressions of reputation or decency, or the checks of natural reason, can raise against them; nay holiness itself, unless well grown, and deeply rooted, can scarcely resist the contagion which ill company spreads. *Can a man (saith Solomon) take fire into his bosom, and his clothes not be burnt?* Prov. vi. 27. And *evil communication* (saith St. Paul) *corrupts good manners*, 1 Cor. xv. But we shall be more sensible of the pernicious effects of ill company, if we consider these two or three things.

1. Sin is the cement of the friendships and intimacies of sinners; vice is the subject of their conversation, and some sensuality or other makes up the diversion and entertainment of such company. And how can it be otherwise? *Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh*, Matth. xii. 32. What can the mouth utter but sin and folly, when the heart is full of wantonness, lust, pride, envy, ambition, sottishness, or vanity? What but polluted streams can flow from a polluted fountain? What but evil, can an evil man bring forth out of the *evil treasure of the heart*? Matth. xii. 35. How hard is it then, even for a good man, to maintain the charity and dignity of his mind, where censures and slanders, malicious wit, or trifling and impertinence, make up the conversation? How hard is it even for such a one to preserve the purity and sobriety of his mind? where riot and luxury is the business they meet about; where pride and ostentation of life is the only thing admired; and nothing has any favour in it, that is wise or good, devout or humble. And if a virtuous person can, in such company, scarcely keep his ground, how easily are those born away by the stream, who are of themselves but too prone to evil, and too fond of temptation?

2. Ill company does naturally instil and propagate vicious principles, worldly maxims, sensual, carnal improvements. Here we are furnished with objections against God and providence, with excuses and apologies for sin; here we learn to ridicule religion and conscience, and dispute ourselves out of all sense and duty.

It is of this sort of communication St. Paul speaks, when he saith, *that it corrupts good manners*. And at this day, those errors which fret like a canker, and consume every thing that is wise and serious in us, have multiplied so beyond measure, that they are no longer the enclosure of some few pretenders to freedom and reason, but the foolishness and meanest, as well as the most vicious part of mankind, are deeply tinged with them.

3. Ill company creates confidence in sin. A custom of talking unconcernedly and loosely, does naturally make way for carelessness and liberty in our actions; and if we repeat either often, we shall soon grow bold and stupid in sin; for if we neglect to make any reflection upon our words or actions, we shall be insensibly betrayed into a hardness of heart; or if (what is worse) we be driven by the reproaches of our conscience upon reflection, to take sanctuary in the cheats and impostures, whether vulgar or more refined, which sinners are wont to put upon themselves, we shall soon sink into prophaneness and atheism. Having thus unfolded to you the truth of the first proposition, and shewed you, that men become such as their company; I am next to proceed to the

II^d, That happiness is the fruit of wisdom, and misery of folly. Men may flatter themselves as they please, and delude themselves with vain words; they may call the proud and rich happy; they may admire the prosperous sinner, and, in a senseless fit, applaud themselves in their vicious pleasures; but they must bid defiance, not only to revelation, but even reason and experience too, ere they can promise themselves a true and lasting satisfaction in any thing but virtue. Revelation tells us plainly, *that godliness*, and that only, *has the promises of the life that now is, and of that which is to come*, 1 Tim. ii. 8. That *if we sow to the flesh, we shall of the flesh reap corruption; but if through the spirit we mortify the deeds of the body, we shall live*, Gal. vi. 8. That *we must all appear before the judgment-seat of Christ, that we may receive according to what we have done in the body, whether it be good or evil*, 2 Cor. v. 10. And both reason and experience, as well as revelation, tell us, that sin is fruitless and dishonourable: Rom. vi. 21. *What fruit had*

ye then in those things whereof ye are now ashamed? that there is no peace to the wicked: that they are like a troubled sea, when it cannot rest, continually throwing up its own mire and dirt, Isa. lvii. 20. That the miseries and calamities of life spring from sin; that sin blasts our enjoyments and possessions; that it gives a sting and edge to all our miseries and misfortunes: for if we did not doat upon the body and the world, the evils of life could not wound us so deeply. In a word, revelation, reason, experience assure us, that righteousness fills the mind with peace and joy; that sin tortures it with contradictions and unreasonable passions, with the guilt and the terrors of the Lord; and what think we must be the result of both in another world? In the day of the revelation of the righteous judgment of God, Rom. viii. 5. Must the nature of things be altered, that the sinner may be saved? Must religion be an imposture, that madness and folly may prove wisdom? Must reason be a mere amusement, that lust and fancy may be infallible guides? Must the judgment of another world contradict all our sense and experience in this; that little raillery and sophistry of the loose and vicious part of mankind, may prove the only thing that has solidity and weight in it? These are things too absurd and ridiculous to be fancied. I will enlarge no longer on a truth which is controverted by none, except the prophane and atheistical; but will on to the third thing proposed;

III. To give some advice for your better conduct, as to society or keeping company. This may be reduced to three heads:

1. We must be very cautious what company we keep.

2. We must endeavour to make the best use of it.

3. We must be fully persuaded, that the due government of ourselves in this point, is a matter of the highest moment.

1. As to the first rule, we must reject the authority of scripture, if we refuse to observe it; for this expressly forbids us to associate ourselves with the wicked and vicious, Prov. iv. 14, 15. *Enter not into the path of the wicked, and go not into the way of evil men; avoid it, pass not by it; turn from it, and pass away.* 2 Thes. iii. 6. Now we command you, brethren, in the

name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walks disorderly, and not after the tradition which ye received of us. 1 Cor. v. 11. But now I have written unto you not to keep company; if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; with such a one do not eat. Nor do the examples of holy men deviate in this point, from the precepts and exhortations of the Spirit. Psal. xxxvi. 4, 5. *I have not sat with vain persons, neither will I go in with dissemblers. I have hated the congregation of evil-doers; and will not sit with the wicked.* Psal. cxix. 63. *I am a companion of all them that fear thee, and them that keep thy precepts.* And thus it was with other good men; they did equally covet good, and shun evil company. Thus Mal. iii. 16. *When wickedness abounded, then they that feared the Lord talked often one to another.* And in the first times of Christianity, great was the intimacy and dearneſs of the disciples of Jesus one with another; great was their abhorrence of all the works of darkness, and all communion and fellowship with those that practised them, as may easily be inferred from Acts ii. and iii. and other places of holy writ. The scripture then is plain in this point: and from what I have said it appears, that reason is so too, unless we can think that wisdom and folly, happiness and misery, are things indifferant.

But here it will be objected, At this rate we shall soon find ourselves obliged to renounce the world, and quit all company. Is not our case much the same with that which St. Paul puts, 1 Cor. v. 9, 10. *I wrote unto you in an epistle, not to company with fornicators; yet not altogether with the fornicators of this world, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or with idolaters, for then must ye needs go out of the world?* To this I answer, (1.) Be it granted, as the objection supposes, that we must keep ill company or none; in this case I affirm it is far better to keep none. Retirement is not so dreadful a thing to a Christian as some think; the calm and peace of the mind is much more desirable than noise and laughter; and the quiet and regularity of privacy much to be preferred before the sensuality and confusion of vicious company. Nor need any one complain of the uncomfortableness of soli-

tude, who can converse when he pleases with patriarchs, prophets, and apostles; nay, with God and his son Jesus. A good man may meet God like Isaac in the fields, or Moses in the desert; he may enjoy communion with him, like David in his bed-chamber, or Joseph in the dungeon. The promise, John, xii. 23. is not limited to place; *If a man love me, he will keep my words, and my Father will love him; and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him.* But on the other hand, in the company of the wicked we shall never find God, nor never feel any effects of his gracious presence; but shall be exposed to the attempts and practices of evil spirits, and to the contagion of vice. The wise man observes, that it is better to live alone, than with a companion of a rough, intractable, and exasperating temper. But I am sure there can be no company, how froward and rough soever, so fatal to our happiness, as that which infills vanity under the advantages and opportunities of friendship: no solitude can be so dismal or unacceptable, as that society which infects the heart, or darkens the understanding; no provocation or insolence can be half so injurious, as that conversation which tends to softness or debauchery, to the betraying us into a love of this world, and a forgetfulness of God.

(2.) This objection may have some colour in a Pagan or a Jewish world, but sure it has none in a Christian one. The church of Christ is not yet left like a cottage in a vineyard; our Jerusalem is not yet degenerated to the degree of Jerusalem of old, when God spoke thus of it in the prophet Jer. v. 1. *Run ye through the streets of Jerusalem, and see now and know, and seek in the broad streets thereof, if ye can find a man, if there be any that executeth judgment, that seeketh the truth, &c.* Nor need we yet pray with the psalmist, Psal. i. 12. *Help, O Lord, for the godly man ceaseth; for the faithful fail from among the children of men; for the servants of God are yet numerous; nor are they driven to their secret chambers, or to the wilderness, or ashamed to own their Lord and Saviour, or to make an open profession of the hope that is in them.*

I grant, will you say, that there are good Christians, but they are not easily, they are not every where to be found; but the worshippers of pleasure do every

where swarm, every where haunt us. There is an easy remedy for this; do thy duty with an humble and unaffected confidence, with a steady and unalterable resolution: put on the garb of a disciple; let the air of a Christian appear in every thing that thou doest, or sayest; let the brightness and beauty of holiness, that enriches and adorns the soul, break forth ever and anon in thy conversation; and thou shalt soon see that the good will love thee, but the wicked will forsake thee: they will shun thee, as ghosts are said to do the light and day; or as hypocrites and profligates did the society of the first Christians; *and of the rest durst no man join himself unto them,* Acts, v. 13. Thou doest too much accommodate thyself to the modes and humours of the world, and this draws upon thee the company of the impertinent and vicious; it is an earthly-vanishing splendour, about which these moths and night-flies flutter: it is jet, not gold and diamond, that is said to attract straws.

(3.) But lastly, This rule obliges us only as far as we can (the nearness of relation, or necessary business, does sometimes make it our duty to converse with those which we otherwise would decline; and in this case all that can be expected is) not to have any fellowship or communion with them in their vices, but to discountenance or reprove them: and as the world goes now, I think this rule is to be extended no farther than to intimacies and familiarities, to voluntary and chosen acquaintance; not to accidental meetings, or occasional correspondencies. But we must take care not to be too favourable and compliant in this matter; the more sin abounds, the less discipline is or can be exercised, the more zealous should we be in particular to do honour to religion, and to fix a mark of shame and infamy upon vice. Never is this rule more scandalously transgressed, than when priests and prelates court the company and favour of atheists and adulterers; or matrons and virgins that of a wretched woman, whose state and port is not more notorious than the shame and lewdness that maintain it. How can our wives or daughters think that there is any shame or turpitude in the sin, when we pay so much respect to the sinner?

2. We must consider what ought to be the true end and design of society and

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conversation among Christians. Certainly that man has a very mean and low notion of friendship, who proposes no other end than to eat and to drink together, or to laugh and fool away our precious moments. The scripture points out to us much nobler purposes and designs of conversation, when it tells us, that our speech should be such *as may administer grace*; that we should *build up one another in our holy faith*; that we should *comfort one another, exhort one another continually*, and so much the more, because *the day approaches*, &c. And surely we are strangely mistaken, if we think that our communication will lose all gust by being directed to one of these ends. On the contrary, it would doubtless be as much more delightful as beneficial, if when we meet we were accustomed, instead of censures and reflections, news and impertinence, or frothiness and lightness, to discourse of some worthy and noble subject, becoming the genius and hope of a Christian. The example of David confirms this notion; he tried and found that friendship was both useful and pleasant, while it was maintained on the stock of religion: *My companion, my guide, my familiar friend; we took sweet counsel together, and walked into the house of God in company*, Psal. lv. 14, 15.

To this it will be again objected; It will be very difficult at all times to find matter and occasion for good discourse. I answer, first, I do not utterly and totally exclude the common accidents of life, the business and affairs of it, nay even things of a pleasant and divertive nature, if modest and inoffensive, from being sometimes the subject of conversation; but, I say, religion ought to be the main and great end of it. Secondly, It is hard for me to conceive how a good Christian should often want either matter or opportunity for pious discourse. As for matter, he must suffer the providences of God to pass without any observation or remark; he must be a stranger to the works of nature; he must be utterly unread in the history of human affairs; he must be unacquainted with the book of God; and he must have little experience of the power and operation of God's word and spirit upon his own soul; he must have reflected very little on the wiles of Satan, the temptations of the world, and the defects and weaknesses of human na-

ture, who can want matter for good discourse. The man of letters, the man of business, the man of pleasure, never wants matter; books furnish the one, business the other, and their vices and diversions the third. It is strange that the Christian alone should be barren: the Christian, who is a child of the light, and of the day, and should abound in wisdom and understanding: the Christian, who has every hour matters of the highest importance on his hands; and who, finally, is entertained with more and richer pleasures than the most fortunate Epicurean can pretend to. As to occasion or opportunity of good discourse, did the heart run that way, every thing would afford it us. But, alas! we rather shun than seek occasions; and I know not by what strange error we have banished all matters of religion out of company; as if nothing but ignorance or affectation could make a man so impertinent, as to talk of any thing that were pious and good. I beseech you to consider, whether this be not a very near approach to the being ashamed of Christ; and if it be, how shall we escape that dreadful sentence which is denounced against it, Mark viii. 38. *Whoever shall be ashamed of me, and of my words, in this wicked and adulterous generation, of him also shall the Son of Man be ashamed, when he cometh in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.* This minds me of the

3d, and last direction, which is, That we must be thoroughly persuaded that the right conduct of ourselves, in the point of society, is a matter of the highest moment and importance. Does not the scripture plainly suggest this, when our Saviour tells us, Mat. xii. *that by our words we shall be justified, and by our words we shall be condemned.* And St. James tells us, James, iii. 2. *If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man.* And it is no wonder the scripture lays so great a stress, or sets so great a value on the due government of the tongue, since nothing tends more to the pleasing of God, to the honour and interest of religion, and to the forming the morals of men. As to this latter, the forming every man's particular manners, I have said enough: one thing here I will only remark; never was there a more illustrious proof of the efficacy of religious conversation, than in the primitive times. Next to that of the spirit of God itself,

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the Christians found no greater support under all their trials, than what they derived from their mutual encouragements and exhortations of one another. And I do not question, but that religious friendship would be as useful now to preserve us against the snares and pleasures of sin, as it was then to uphold them under their fiery trials and afflictions, were our discourses now actuated by the same spirit theirs were then. As to the pleasing God, must not God, think you, be as well pleased with our talking of and magnifying his wondrous works, in our familiar conversations with one another, as with our praising and extolling him in our closets; and must not the regard and reverence which we testify for him in company, be as acceptable to him as our private adorations? Spring they not from the same principle, and is not the one as subservient (to say no more) to his glory as the other? As to the honour and interest of religion, nothing can more effectually promote it than the giving a frequent and public testimony of our value for it. Which way can we more clearly convince the world of the excellency and virtue of it; which way can we more effectually propagate in one another the love of it, than by making it appear, that it has moulded and formed our souls into the image of God; that it has possessed our thoughts, and refined our conversation? But on the other hand, if we have no regard to our talk, if we think this a matter which conscience is not concerned in, we shall soon see religion daily lose ground; for we shall soon learn to think and act with the same liberty we talk; and this will introduce a strange face of things in a little time.

Now to close all; If our care or unconcernment in this point be of this vast consequence, we cannot but think we shall be called to a strict account about it, in another world; the day is coming, when the Lord will fulfil his promise, Mal. iii. *And the Lord hearkened and heard, and a book of remembrance was written; and they shall be mine, saith the Lord, in that day when I make up my jewels.* The day is coming when God will execute the threat denounced in the apostle Jude, *Behold the Lord cometh with ten thousand of his saints, to execute judgment upon all, to convince all that are ungodly amongst us, of all their ungodly deeds which they have ungodlily com-*

mitted; and of all their hard speeches, which ungodly sinners have spoken against him.

S E R M O N C I.

By JOHN ORR, M. A.

Rector of Maryborough in Ireland.

The external Duties of Religious Worship, and positive Rites of Christianity.

HEB. x. 25.

Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another.

IT is the matter of almost every one's observation, that men are very apt to run into extremes; that not only different men do so, but that the same men, at different times, have violent fondnesses and aversions to the very same things; many instances of which may be seen in their conduct, not only in regard to trifling amusements and affairs of little consequence, but with respect to matters of the most serious concern and greatest importance to them; but that we may confine ourselves to one instance, relating to that which is to be the subject of the present discourse; while a great number of those who make profession of religion, have so high an opinion of the duties of devotion and the external acts of divine worship, and lay out so much of their time and zeal about them, as to shew themselves to be no better than enthusiasts in the notions which they entertain of them, and grossly superstitious in the use which they make of them; there are, on the other hand, many others, some of whom are not to be thought void of a true sense of religion, who set no great value upon these things; who consider them to be always capable of great abuse and corruption, and frequently productive of a great deal of harm, and to be at best but weak and childish amusements, little deserving the regard of a wise man, who can offer to God a more manly and reasonable service, a pure heart and a virtuous life; which, say they, after all the zeal that has been expressed for other matters, are the only things which are of real worth and importance; nay, of those who

who have been some time most remarkable for their zealous and punctual attendance on the outward forms and rites of religious worship, there are several who have quite altered their conduct; who, from a superstitious strictness and scrupulosity in these points, have fallen into an entire neglect of all positive duties and instituted methods of worshipping God; who have conceived such a horror of their former delusions and the evil consequences of them, that they resolve to keep at the utmost distance from what was the occasion of drawing them into these delusions; and so throw off all regard to a public worship, and the instrumental duties of religion, imagining that they can sufficiently acquit themselves of their duty, by maintaining an inward veneration and love of the Deity, by acting as honest and useful members of society, and performing the duties of the several relations in which Providence has placed them in the world.

Thus many despise and neglect the duties of an external worship, because they have been unhappily perverted and abused; while others, from a wretched insensibility and unconcernedness in all matters of religion, are altogether indifferent and careless about them, as well as about things of greater value and importance. But from whatsoever cause the negligence of men in this matter may proceed, it is certainly a thing of very evil tendency, and most plainly inconsistent with our duty as Christians; which I shall endeavour to make appear, by considering,

I. What the appointment of Christianity is with respect to an external worship.

II. The wise and good ends which will be served by this appointment, when it is duly observed.

First, I shall consider what the appointment of Christianity is with respect to an external worship. The Christian religion is certainly an institution of great plainness and simplicity; which is far from abounding with external observances and positive rites, which prescribes a rational and spiritual worship of God, and always lays the greatest stress upon the integrity and virtue of the mind, and makes no account at all of any outward performances, how plausible and splendid soever they may be, when separated from inward piety

and goodness. But notwithstanding all this, we shall very much mistake the matter, if we imagine Christianity to be so very refined and spiritual a thing, as to have no outward acts of worship, and no instituted rites and duties belonging to it: something of this kind has made a part of every religion that has been known in the world, and seems to be altogether necessary for adapting a religious institution to the general use and practice of mankind.

For understanding what the particular duties and rites of external worship prescribed by Christianity are, we must consider that some duties of this sort are of such evident and universal necessity, and of such great and public use, that they have had a place in every scheme of religion, that with any appearance of reason has been proposed for the common service and benefit of men; such as a solemn invocation of the Deity by prayer, the celebration of his praises and returning him thanks for his mercies, an inquiry into his will, and the instructing and assisting men in the practice of it. There seems to be a propensity in human nature to some of these duties, antecedently to the consideration of their beneficial tendency; and they are all such as the common light of reason has always recommended as most proper and effectual means of religion; as things which should be practised both privately and publicly by men, for preserving and cherishing a just and lively impression of God in their minds, and giving this its proper power and influence over their actions. Our Saviour therefore has adopted these duties in his institution, and has confirmed and strengthened the obligations which men were under to attend to them by his own authority, requiring his disciples to offer prayers and thanksgivings to God, not only privately and separately, but openly, and in communion with one another, to meet together for a public and solemn performance of these duties of divine worship, *and for provoking one another to love and good works*; giving them great encouragements and advantages for doing this, by promising his own presence in the assemblies which they hold for these purposes, by describing the qualifications with which their devotions should be presented to God, and assuring them of his acceptance in the serious exercise

ercise of them; and by laying down a perfect pattern for directing and governing both their private and social prayers. And besides these duties of external worship, which are appendages of natural religion, and may be considered as instrumental duties of it, as well as of Christianity, our Saviour has required the observation of two positive rites, commonly known by the name of the Sacraments; which are very easy and simple ceremonies, the one consisting in washing the body with water, *in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost*, for initiating us solemnly into a profession of the Christian faith, and obliging us to a strict performance of all the duties belonging to that holy profession; and the other consisting in our eating bread and drinking wine, in remembrance of the sufferings and death of our Saviour, and as a token of our union with him the head, and with all our fellow christians the members of his spiritual body.

These are the outward duties and rites which our Saviour has commanded his followers to practise and observe in the celebration of divine worship*. And accordingly we find that these were things which men in the early times of Christianity were very intent on. The account which we have of the apostles and other disciples of our Lord, who, immediately after his ascension, waited at Jerusalem, for the accomplishment of his promise concerning the gifts of the Spirit, is, that they *continued with one accord in prayer and supplication*, Acts, i. 14. And when by the miraculous descent of the Holy Ghost, and the preaching of St. Peter in a few days afterwards, three thousand new converts were added to their number, and admitted into their society, by the initiating ceremony of bap-

* I know that some may think that baptism, partaking of the Lord's supper, and the instructing men in the principles and duties of religion, are improperly represented as acts of divine worship. And according to the strict notion of religious worship, this is very true. But as these are duties to be attended to in obedience to the will of God, and designed to raise a temper of piety, or those affections which are most properly religious; they may, in a general sense, be considered, as they commonly are, as parts of the religious worship required by Christianity. Which, I hope, may justify the speaking of them, in several places of this discourse, as duties of the Christian worship, though in other places they are distinguished from them.

tism, we are told concerning them all, *that they continued stedfastly in the apostle's doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers*, Acts, ii. 42. They all together made one church or religious society; they lived together in one visible external communion, hearkening to the instructions of the apostles, partaking of the Lord's supper, and offering their common praises and prayers to God. And agreeably to the pattern of this primitive church, many others, as the number of Christians daily increased, were soon formed and modelled; in every one of which a public worship of God was solemnized in the duties of adoration, prayer, and thanksgiving; the principles and doctrines of Christianity were explained and inculcated, baptism was administered to proselytes,* and the Lord's supper was celebrated by the whole body of Christian professors. These are facts sufficiently clear and certain from the history of the Acts and the Epistles of the New Testament, to say nothing of any other authorities; in which we find that the apostles, wherever they had any success in propagating the knowledge of Christianity, founded a church, or formed their converts into a body or society, for rendering a public homage to God, and for instructing and edifying one another; that the members of each of these churches kept up a visible communion with the members of other churches as they had opportunity, and had a stated communion among themselves, in the several duties and rites of the Christian worship; and that to carry on a public worship among them with greater regularity and effect, some persons were set apart for the purpose of presiding in their religious assemblies, for directing and assisting the rest in the outward exercises of their devotion, and informing them in every part of their duty, and exciting them to the practice of it.

And that there is nothing in all this that was any way peculiar to the first times of the gospel, nothing but what should be observed and practised by Christians in all ages, is plain, because neither the nature of these external duties of religious worship which were practised by the primitive Christians, nor the directions of our Saviour concerning them, confine them to one time more than another; because most of them have a foundation

dation in reason independently of the commandment of our Lord, and should always be attended to on account of their apparent good tendency, and natural aptitude for promoting the great ends of religion; and because the two rites which depend purely upon the positive will and appointment of the Institutor are declared to be standing institutions in the church; our Saviour having promised his disciples to be with them in the use of one of these rites *to the end of the world*, Matt. xxviii. 19, 20.; and St. Paul having told us concerning the other, that the death of our Lord is to be commemorated in it, *till his second coming*, 1 Cor. xi. 26.

As for the forms and modes, the places and times of performing and celebrating the external duties and rites of the Christian worship, there is hardly any thing particularly commanded. In the Jewish religion these circumstances were all limited and fixed by special laws; but under the liberty of Christianity, they are left as matters of indifferency, which may be diversified according to the various notions and tempers of men, and are to be determined by every particular church, consulting what will be most effectual for promoting common order and peace, and for *edifying the body of Christ in love*. Only as to a certain proportion of time, which is in general to be set apart for the exercises of religion and the worship of God: as we are told in the sacred history, that God from the beginning consecrated one day in seven to these employments; as the same institution was renewed to the people of Israel in the law of the sabbath; as this is a very fit proportion of time to be dedicated to the uses of religion, as it neither encroaches too much on the necessary business and commerce of life, nor leaves too great intervals for the impressions of religion to wear away; as the apostles and first Christians religiously observed one day in the weekly revolution, though not the same in order that was observed under the Jewish dispensation; as it was their constant custom from the time of our Saviour's resurrection, and in honour of it, to appropriate the first day of the week to the purposes of a public and social worship of God, and as this is characterised by one of the apostles themselves as a day of note and distinction among them; from all these considera-

tions, we may pretty strongly infer, that one day in every week is to be separated by us from the common occupations and amusements of life, and to be devoted in a more peculiar manner than the rest of our time to the duties of divine worship, to the instruction and improvement of ourselves and others in the knowledge and practice of religion, and to such acts of Christian charity and friendship as are the best indications and most proper fruits of a truly pious temper and disposition; and that we are bound to apply particularly the first day of the week to these ends, so far, at least, as the practice and example of the apostles and most early Christians can lay an obligation upon us to do so.

II. I shall now consider what wise and good ends will be served by the appointment of Christianity with respect to an external worship, when it is duly observed.

It is a great excellency and advantage of the Christian religion, that the external duties and positive rites of it are not only simple and few, but of a plain use and signification; that we are not at a loss about the reasons of their institution, which is the case as to many of the Jewish rites, and which must have made the observation of them very tedious and burthensome; but that we can easily see that they are wisely designed, and capable, if duly attended to, of promoting the most important and excellent purposes.

I. One great end which is served by them, is the preservation of the knowledge and profession of Christianity in the world. Without the assistance of external institutions and forms, it would have been impossible for the Christian religion to have subsisted for any considerable time, and in any large extent, among men: the miracles that were performed by our Lord and his apostles, would, perhaps, have been sufficient for introducing it, and supporting it in the age in which they were done; but when these miracles had ceased, the gospel would very soon have been upon the decline, and must in succeeding times have made but a slow and small progress, when no methods were instituted or used for propagating it, that were in any sort proportioned to the circumstances and capacities of the main body of mankind. We cannot imagine that

that the doctrine of our Saviour, whatever confirmation he might originally have given it, would have had a much better fate than the doctrine of the philosophers, if, like that, it had been only a system of speculative principles and purely moral precepts: in this case, it might have been always known to a few curious and inquisitive men, while all the rest of the world about them would have been almost entirely ignorant of it, and many not so much as acquainted with the name of its author. It is certain that the generality of the world have neither leisure nor inclination to acquire any great knowledge of ancient books and writings, however valuable and important in the way of study and research into them; but if they get any considerable acquaintance with them, they must get it chiefly by the assistance of living instructors, and by such methods and forms, as will, without much trouble, insinuate the notions contained in them into their minds. The external institutions of Christianity, therefore, must be of the greatest use for preserving and propagating the knowledge of it, as one of them is designed for instructing men in the doctrines of the gospel, and all of them are apt, as often as they are used, to recall the principles of it, and to make them familiar to the mind: so that they are methods of propagating Christianity that are suited to the capacity and situation of the meanest persons; and if any thing will be effectual for diffusing the knowledge of it among all sorts and orders of men, these institutions will. And in fact to them it is owing, that great numbers of the lowest rank of mankind, among whom the notions of philosophy could never make any progress, have always had a tolerable understanding of the principles and doctrines of the gospel. And as these institutions have hitherto been effectual for preserving the knowledge and supporting the profession of the Christian religion; so it is not to be doubted but that under the influence of Divine Providence they will be the means of conveying and transmitting it to all succeeding generations.

2. Another most valuable end that will be obtained by a due attendance on the external institutions of the Christian worship, is, the fixing a deep and strong impression of the doctrines of the gospel and the principles of virtue in the minds

of men. These institutions will not only furnish us with speculative notions of the doctrines of Christianity, but will raise and enliven our perceptions of them, will make them enter far into the mind, and take a thorough possession of it; and will consequently give them the greatest influence for engaging us to the practice of piety and virtue. This therefore is a matter of great moment. Every one may know that the perception even of the most important truths, if cold and unanimated, will have but little or no force upon the hearts and lives of men; that we must dwell on the consideration of them, fully imbibe and digest them, and have them habitually in our thoughts, before they will be sufficient for governing our affections, and become the seeds and principles of an uniformly good conduct in us. And though a few retired contemplative men may perhaps be able by their own reflections, without confining themselves to particular institutions and forms, to preserve in their minds such a quick and strong sense of the great principles and obligations of religion and moral virtue, as will be a constant flame of devotion in their hearts, and habitually influence them to an honest and worthy behaviour; yet the greatest part of mankind, by no means have it in their power to do this. It is plain indeed, that men are not made or designed for a contemplative, so much as an active life; neither their natural passions nor their situation in this world will permit them generally to pursue the former: for some few, who, by a wise disposition of Providence, have always a turn towards contemplation, there is an infinitely greater number, in whom it is never to be expected, at least in the degree that would be necessary to enable them, without any foreign direction and assistance, to acquire just and comprehensive notions of their duty, and to maintain a lively and affectionate impression of it in their hearts. So that if the generality of men are ever brought to a true and full sense of the principles of piety and virtue, and come to live under the power of them, it must be by methods which will check the natural levity of their minds, and put a stop, at proper seasons, to the hurry of their worldly affairs; which will elevate and animate their thoughts, and fix their attention on morally good objects; which

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which will engage them in a course of serious reflections, and give these the freest entrance into their minds. And it is evident that the external institutions and rites of Christianity are extremely well adapted to the promoting of these ends: for what can be more proper to compose and elevate the minds of men, to fix them on the noblest objects, and to make the most serious impressions on them, than solemn addresses to the Deity, which bring them under the most immediate influence of his presence, and engage them in the most attentive consideration of his nature and perfections? What can be better calculated for supplying men, naturally inconsiderate, and too apt to be diverted from all serious thoughts by the pleasures and cares of life, with matter of good reflection, and giving them a taste for spiritual and divine things, than the obliging them at stated times to suspend their worldly pursuits, and to apply themselves to the exercises of devotion, and to meditations on divine subjects, to receive instructions in the doctrines of the gospel, and to have the several motives of it earnestly and affectionately pressed home upon them? What will lay good principles deeper in the heart, and give them a fuller possession of it, than our taking upon us the profession of the Christian religion, and obliging ourselves to the several duties which it requires, by a solemn and significant rite? And what can be more apt to inspire us with the most noble sentiments, with the most generous and divine affections, than the commemorating the passion and death of our Saviour, by another expressive ceremony? Certainly, if our nature is at all susceptible of generous impressions, we cannot but be tenderly and deeply affected with the inestimable goodness both of Almighty God, and of our blessed Lord, which is thus exhibited to our consideration; and must feel the most ardent gratitude and love towards them, prevailing in our hearts, disposing and constraining us to dedicate and resign ourselves most cheerfully and entirely to their service and obedience. We may appeal to the reason of every ingenuous man, whether these things have not the plainest tendency to strengthen and improve good principles, and to form a temper of solid piety and virtue in all who carefully attend to them; and

whether it be indeed possible for a man long to attend to them with judgment and affection, without finding himself much improved in this temper by them? We may farther appeal to the experience of the world, whether they are not always the means of maintaining a sense of religion, and of moral obligations, in a much stronger degree than could otherwise be expected, in great multitudes of men? Whether many professed Christians of mean capacities, and a low situation in life, are not by means of the external institutions of the gospel, evidently raised up to a degree of wisdom and virtue, which they must necessarily fall short of without them? And whether even men of the most refined understandings, and the most generous natures, by the same means do not always receive a new and noble relish of divine matters; whether they are not thereby farther established in virtue, and have all the pleasures of it raised and heightened in them? This will be very plain to all who have any knowledge of human nature, and have observed what the things are that form the tempers and influence the conduct of men. So that the external institutions of Christianity are not only calculated for giving men lively impressions of religion, and improving them in the practice of it; but actually produce these effects in some considerable degree, among a great part of mankind.

3. Another good purpose which will be served by an attendance on the external institutions and rites of the gospel, is the promoting of a mutual esteem, friendship, and love among Christians. This may be expected as a consequence from our attendance on the external duties and rites of religious worship prescribed by Christianity, upon a better foundation than the mere propensity of men to be more closely attached to those whom they consider as of a party or particular denomination with themselves. For by having all the same liberty of access to the throne of supreme glory, and offering our common devotions to the *one God and Father of all, in the name of the one Lord and Mediator between God and Men*, we must see that we are all equally related to God as his children, and stand upon one common foundation for recommending ourselves to his favour; and by partaking all of one baptism, we are not only

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all engaged in the same holy profession, but upon making good our engagement, are all entitled to the same blessed hope of salvation; and by eating all one bread, in the Lord's supper, we acknowledge ourselves with our fellow-Christians to be all one body, united under Christ the common head. From whence we may very naturally conclude, that we are to have the sincerest esteem for all our brethren, and that a spirit of mutual love is to animate the whole society of Christians; that all who are really members of the body of Christ, are to be dear to one another, on account of those spiritual and high relations which they have in common to Almighty God, and to our blessed Saviour, and those good qualities which entitle them all to the divine favour; that the weakest and meanest of them are not to be despised on account of their humble condition, nor the greatest to be envied for their superior abilities and advantages; that those of them who are most highly dignified in this world, should be always ready to stoop to the lowest acts of humility and condescension for the good of an afflicted brother; and that all should rejoice in one another's happiness, and take every opportunity of promoting it.

I proceed to draw two or three inferences from what has been discoursed, with which I shall conclude.

1. It follows very plainly from what has been said, that the neglect or omission of the duties of external worship, enjoined by Christianity, is very criminal and inexcusable in all who profess to believe the gospel. Though we saw no use or end of these duties, and had no reason to persuade us to observe them, but a mere declaration of the will of God, that we should do so; yet this surely would be a sufficient foundation for our attending to them, and we could not shew a carelessness or indifference about them, without being guilty of unpardonable presumption, and a failure in the submission which we naturally owe to the great Lord and Governor of all things. But when we find that these duties are not only required by the positive will of God, but besides that they are of the greatest use for supporting the profession of Christianity in the world, for fixing a lively sense of the doctrines and principles of it in our minds, for animating us with a noble ardour in the practice of virtue, and for

uniting us in love to one another, what must be thought of the neglect of them? Is it not most evidently a bad thing, as it argues not only a want of respect to the Deity, but a defect in every generous principle, and a stupid unconcernedness about the things which are of the utmost importance for promoting the dignity and happiness of mankind? In vain would any plead in excuse of this neglect, that they are so much employed about the virtues which are the end of religion, that they have no time to attend to the things that are only the instruments and means of it; for this never has been, nor ever will be, the situation of any persons upon earth: and as little will they be able to excuse it, by pretending that they are Christians of so high a form as to be above the use of the instrumental duties of the gospel, or that they have already arrived at such a perfect habit of virtue, as not to stand in need of those helps which may be wanted by others for maintaining a just impression of the obligations of religion in their minds, and supporting and setting them forward in the practice of it. For besides that it is hardly possible for a man to speak in this manner concerning himself, without being charged with pride and arrogance, the supposition upon which this excuse depends, is not to be made—that men may attain to such perfection in religion in this world, as not to be capable of receiving any new improvements from an attendance on the external institutions of the gospel; this, I say, is by no means true: the most elevated beings in the universe, if we except only the Supreme Being himself, are probably always in a progress towards a state of higher perfection. It is very certain, that the men who have attained to the greatest measures of wisdom and virtue in this life, are still capable of growing wiser and better; and it is as certain that a serious attendance on the external institutions of Christianity, will be at least as effectual for their improvement, as any occasional meditations and reflections of their own, or any other means that they can use, will be. But, if it should be admitted that some very extraordinary persons might be dispensed with from attending to the duties of external worship, so far as their own improvement depends on that; yet surely the setting a good example in this particular to persons of lower

lower abilities and attainments, must be a matter of some importance to them: it may very well be expected, that the men whom we now speak of, should be always ready from pure humanity, and a regard to the propagation of that virtue, of which they are supposed to have such a noble sense in their minds, to encourage by their own practice an attendance on the instrumental duties of religion, which is very necessary for the instruction and improvement of the generality of men, and is always of some use to a considerable part of them. But, alas! how few are there who can be supposed any way capable of persevering and proceeding in an uniform course of moral goodness, without the assistance of the external institutions and instrumental duties of religion? This, if it be a thing possible for any men, requires such extraordinary talents and qualifications, as never fall to the share of any large number: and indeed, if we will look into the actions of those, who are pleased to express a contempt for the external duties and forms of religious worship, and live in the utter neglect of them; who imagine themselves full of such a high admiration and love of virtue, as is sufficient of itself to secure their perseverance in a good course; I am afraid that the conduct of many of them will be found very disproportionable to such high pretensions; and that with all their fine theories about the excellence and importance of moral virtue; and all the zeal which they would appear to have for it, they will be judged to transgress the rules of it, in many plain instances, and to fall into such gross acts of vice, as the men who cultivate a serious sense of devotion, and accustom themselves regularly and discreetly to the exercise of it, are hardly to be ever charged with.

2. Let us guard against all enthusiastic and superstitious abuses of the external duties and rites of the Christian worship. This is a thing very necessary both for our receiving the improvement which may be obtained from an attendance on these duties and rites, and for removing the prejudices which many have conceived against them, and recommending them to the more general observation and use of the world. When we mistake the nature and design of these duties and rites, when we foolishly ima-

gine that there is a virtue in the bare outward acts, or perhaps that there is something more spiritual and divine in them than in any other duties of religion; when we address ourselves to them with a particular dread and awe in our minds, and are more scrupulous and punctual about every little circumstance and formality in our devotions, than we are about the practice of moral virtue itself; when we place our religion chiefly in devotional exercises, or when we substitute these in the room of moral goodness, and offer them to God as a composition for a virtuous life: when we think and act thus with respect to the external duties of religious worship; as we grossly pervert them, so we not only prevent their having any good effects on us, but render them instruments of great evil to ourselves; as they divert our attention from the things on which it should be chiefly fixed, and fill us with a fond hope that we are entitled to all the benefits promised in the gospel, though we do not perform the principal and most important duties of it; while at the same time we must naturally give rash and unwary minds, who will not distinguish between the proper design and the accidental abuses of things, no just objections indeed, but disgusts and aversions, which may have all the effects of the justest objections to these duties of external worship, when they see them to be so unduly magnified, to the diminution and prejudice of matters of greatly superior worth and consequence. So that if we would either render these duties profitable to ourselves, or recommend them to the observation of others, it is very necessary to guard against those perversions of them, which some men of a warm imagination, or a superstitious temper, are apt to run into. And this we shall best do, by considering them in their proper light, of being instruments or means of forming a good habit of mind in us, and engaging us to a virtuous course of life; that therefore there can be no sanctity in the external performances themselves, but that the whole merit of them is derived from their being acts of obedience to the will of God, and their subserviency in promoting moral goodness; that they are always to be kept in a due subordination to this great end of religion, which is a thing that has an intrinsic and im-

mediate worth in it, and is of necessary and perpetual obligation, prior to all consideration of its tendency and consequences, and independently of all positive commands: so that whenever moral virtues and instrumental or positive duties happen to interfere, the latter must always give way to the former; and in our attendance on instrumental duties and positive rites, we must still aim at improving ourselves in morally good qualities, and never think that we have made the proper use of them, till we have found their efficacy for restraining us from vice and wickedness, and making us *holy in all manner of conversation*. This notion, which both reason and scripture suggest to us, about the use and subordination of the external duties and rites of devotion, if well fixed in our minds, will be the best preservative against those corruptions of them, which have often rendered them not only vain and insignificant, but very hurtful and pernicious to men; and have afforded the most plausible pretence, to those who have wanted such a thing, for neglecting and disregarding them; and will prepare us for such a rational attendance on them, as may both have a happy effect upon ourselves, and remove the prejudices of others against them, and give them a just impression of their wise design and beneficial tendency.

3. Let us always attend to the external duties of the Christian worship, with an inward seriousness and devotion of mind. This is a qualification absolutely necessary for rendering our performance of these duties acceptable to God, and deriving any benefit from it to ourselves. For notwithstanding the natural aptitude of the instrumental duties of the gospel, to inspire good sentiments, and to raise pious and virtuous affections in us, the efficacy of them, as of all the other means which God employs for our reformation, will certainly depend upon our own disposition to make a right use and improvement of them. If we content ourselves *with drawing near to God with our mouths, while our hearts are far from him*; if we engage in the duties of his worship with a trifling and careless temper of mind, without any suitable affections towards him, and without any sense of what we are about; if we perform them only from custom; the most

splendid acts of our devotion will be but dead forms, a mere bodily exercise, which will have no virtue to recommend us to God, or to produce any good effect in us at all: nay, so far will the most specious expressions of devotion, in which the heart has no concern, be from honouring and pleasing God, that he will rather deem them to be an impious mockery and contempt of him; and so far will a mere customary performance of the external duties of piety be from contributing to our establishment and improvement in virtue, that it will be the means of hardening our hearts, and rendering us insensible to the most powerful impressions and motives of religion. So that it very much concerns us to bring a serious and attentive mind to our devotions; to pray and give thanks to God with earnestness and warmth of affection, to read the holy scriptures and meditate upon them, and to attend to the several institutions of the gospel, with a sincere intention of being farther informed and improved in our duty by them; to take care that not only the inward frame of our spirits, but that our outward appearance be grave and composed, while we profess to be employed in the duties of divine worship; to shew no signs of levity in our countenances, or in any part of our behaviour, and to order all our bodily motions and postures in the way that will be most likely to fix and raise our minds. Thus may we hope that God will accept the spiritual sacrifices which we present to him, and that we shall find the good influence of our devotional duties for our instruction and edification in religion, or for making us, as St. Peter speaks, *to grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ; to whom be glory both now and for ever. Amen.* (2 Pet. iii 18.)

S E R M O N CII.

By the Rev. Dr. DELANY.

The Nature and Character of Envy.

PROV. xiv. 30.

A sound heart is the life of the flesh; but envy the rottenness of the bones.

IT is agreed among moralists, that all the laws of nature, as far as they comprehend the duties we owe to one another,

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ther, may be reduced to this one great principle of universal benevolence, viz. That we lay it down as the fixed and fundamental rule of all our actions, to do all manner of good, and to abstain from all manner of evil.

The motives to this conduct, besides the beauty and agreeableness of it, both to our own nature, and the divine will, are these: 1. That, (however men of narrow apprehensions may imagine otherwise, yet) all mankind in reality consult their own interest best, when they contribute to the good of the whole. 2. That there is an intrinsic pleasure resulting from the practice of virtue, and such as hath a natural tendency to peace of mind, and health of body. And 3. That it endears and recommends us to the love and esteem of all mankind.

Whereas, on the contrary, anguish of heart, hatred, disesteem, and insecurity, are the natural rewards of iniquity, even in this world: and as this is no where more conspicuous than in the passion and vice of envy, now before us; so the contrast betwixt that, and a humane, benevolent, good-natured disposition, is no where more strongly or beautifully expressed than in the words of my text: *A sound heart is the life of the flesh; but envy the rottenness of the bones.* A sound heart, or, as the original may otherwise be rendered, a heart of lenity, or medicine. All which are meant to signify, that a benevolent, good-natured disposition, is a kindly, genial, vital principle, that infuses balm and healing into the blood, and produces a strong pleasure, like that which results from good health, and a right temperament: whereas envy is a leaven that sours and corrupts, sets all the humours upon the fret, and is the direct contradiction to happiness and health; the bane of all that is good, and beautiful, and desirable, in life.

And therefore, in order to represent this odious passion in its true light, and make it as hateful to you, as it is detestable in itself, I shall endeavour in the following discourse to shew you,

I. The nature and origin of envy; and who they are that are most subject to it.

II. I shall shew you the symptoms by which it may be known.

III. I shall endeavour to explain and trace out the ill effects of it.

IV. And lastly, I shall endeavour to assign the remedies of this pernicious passion.

Ist, then, As to the nature of envy, it is a pain, or uneasiness, arising from an apprehension of the prosperity and good fortune of others; not because we suffer from their welfare, nor that our condition may be bettered by our uneasiness, but merely because their condition is bettered.

There is a strong jealousy of pre-eminence and superiority implanted in our nature by almighty God, for wise and noble purposes; to excite to the pursuit of laudable attainments, and the imitation of good and great actions. When this principle takes root in a good mind, it is called emulation. Now emulation is also an uneasiness occasioned by the good fortune of others; but not because we repine at their prosperity, but because we ourselves have not attained the same good success. The effect of this principle is, to excite us to great designs, and worthy performances. It was this that made Cæsar weep at the sight of Alexander's statue, to think that he had already passed that age at which the other hero had conquered the world.

But when this principle meets with an evil, corrupt disposition, it then degenerates into envy, the most malignant and hateful passion in human nature, the worst weed of the worst soil! And this is so far from stirring us up to worthy imitations, and laudable pursuits, that it takes a quite contrary method; and labours to taint and depreciate what it doth not so much as attempt to equal.

Now this passion affects us chiefly in relation to our equals, at least those that we think should be so, if some good turn of fortune had not raised them above us: and the reason of it seems to be this; it hath pleased God to implant in us all, strong desires of power and affluence: but forasmuch as there is no certain portion of these fixed, nor any standard settled, by which it may be determined when any man enjoys either of these in proportion to his merits; the only way of estimating our success in the attainment of them, is, by comparing our fortune with those of like birth, or education, or condition of life, with ourselves: if we find we have equalled or exceeded these, the natural consequence is joy and complacency in

our condition; but if we are exceeded by them, emulation, or envy: emulation, if we are virtuous and good men (for then this pre-eminence of our equals is a new spur to our industry, and urges us on to honest pursuits); but envy, if we are corrupt and worthless: for then we are prompted to decry and lessen what we cannot equal; that so, at least, we may bring those down to our own level, whom we cannot bear to behold above us.

From hence it follows, that we seldom envy those whom their birth and fortune have placed greatly above us, nor those that are very far inferior to us; because neither of these are the standards by which we measure our own felicity: neither do we envy the dead, nor men of remote and foreign regions; because, with these, we can have no contention, or competition of honour and pre-eminence.

Now the persons most subject to this unhappy passion of envy are, 1st, The covetous; because they think every thing ravished from themselves, that accrues to their equals; imagining that, if it had not been for their interposition, they might have attained those advantages that were equally in their reach.

2dly, (If these may justly be distinguished from the covetous) Men of little and mean spirits are most subject to envy; because to these every thing appears great and extraordinary: as if their minds bore some analogy to microscope-glasses, which magnify in proportion to their littleness.

3dly, Men of extraordinary endowments and abilities, or that are renowned on account of some uncommon excellence, or mighty performances, and, in general, men that are studious of the same attainments, whether of wealth, or wisdom, or valour, or the like, are very subject to envy; because their interests either do, or at least are often imagined to interfere, and therefore they cannot bear a rival. It was this set Pompey and Cæsar at mortal variance; because, as the historians observe, the one could not bear an equal, nor the other a superior.

Proud men also are remarkably subject to this vice, especially if their pride be founded upon wealth, beauty, birth, or any other consideration distinct from real merit, if they have no real and valuable advantages to pride themselves upon

(such as learning, wisdom, virtue, or useful arts, of some kind, whereby the world may be benefited); because then their birth, or wealth, or other accidental or imaginary advantages, being their only distinctions above others, they cannot bear to see those men grow up into esteem, and wealth, and honour, by the force of their own merit, who before were their inferiors; and who, they foresee, must one day be better, and more justly esteemed, than themselves.

And, lastly, old men are very subject to envy: because they see the youth possessed of those advantages which once were theirs, and which they imagine they have yet a right to.

And thus having shewn you the nature and origin of envy, and who they are that are most subject to it; I proceed, in the next place,

II. To shew the symptoms by which it may be known. And,

First, It is a shrewd sign of our envying any person, when we find ourselves averse from doing him good offices; for this is a great corruption of nature, which, in its purity, is social and benevolent, and hath a strong propensity to acts of kindness and goodness, as well as a strong pleasure in the performance of them: whereas envy is a narrow, selfish principle, utterly inconsistent with that universal charity, which is the first dictate of uncorrupt nature, and which our blessed Saviour recommends to us as the distinguishing and fundamental duty of his followers. And yet one would think, that even pride and ambition (which are almost inseparable ingredients of envy) should find their account in good offices: forasmuch as to relieve the indigent, to ease the oppressed, and to comfort the afflicted, to benefit our enemies, and to do good for evil, are, in reality, the happiest employments and noblest triumphs of human nature! and I am confident would always be thought so, if it were not for that corrupt, selfish principle, that checks and cramps every thing that is good and noble in our nature: and therefore it is much to be suspected, that avarice is the great root of envy; because that is so apt to represent every thing as lost, and taken away from ourselves, that is given to another: as if we were necessarily injured by every thing by which another is benefited. But,

2dly,

2dly, A second symptom of envy, and a much surer than the former, is when we are pleased with the evil of others. This is such a degree of corruption, as reverses our whole nature, and renders it the very contrary to what it should be. It is a corruption that approaches to the malignity of cursed spirits, nay, and is monstrous even in them. And it hath this singularity in it, that it hath evil for its object, in an eminent degree, above any other passion whatsoever. Even anger, unruly and outrageous as it is, relaxes either by time or satisfaction, and for the most part calms into good-nature, and benevolence; and nothing in nature, but envy, is steadily and permanently malignant.

3dly, Another symptom of envy, is, a censorious disposition; and this discovers itself either in industriously silencing the good actions of others, or exposing the bad: but, indeed, it seldom rests here.— It extends itself even to the doubtful and indifferent; nay, too often, to the good and virtuous: and seldom fails, either by uncharitable interpretations, or strained consequences, to affix some colour or intention of evil to them. And because it is often seen in this shape, and is always odious in all shapes; therefore it uses a variety of artifices to hide its deformity. The most common disguise is pity; and it must be owned it is, at the same time, the best: because there is no excellence in this world that hath not its alloy. Learning is too often proud, judgment slow, wit injudicious, and so of the rest: and therefore it is easy to hide the rancour of our envy, under the compassion we would be thought to bestow upon that unhappy imperfection, which clouds and depresses the excellence we seem to admire, at the same time that we industriously malign and decry it as much as possible.

At other times it puts on the appearance of wit and delicacy: it is a nicety of taste that disposes us to dislike and disrelish the accomplishments and performances of others; but still with an air of contempt, and conscious superiority, rather than of envy.

The last symptom of envy that I shall mention, is, a discontented, querulous disposition, repining at the dispensations of Providence; that the foundations are out of course, virtue and merit are despised and oppressed, and nothing but vice and

villany prosper, and carry all before them! and yet, when all this comes to be inquired into, it will be found, perhaps, to mean no more than that the complainant is not in the condition he wishes to be; or in other words, that the most worthless man alive is not at the top of his ambition, and avarice! Let any man but consider the shameful hypocrisy of this conduct, to make a seeming concern for the interest of virtue and religion a cloak to the most flagitious vice! Nor is the folly of it less conspicuous than the impiety; forasmuch as the true way to happiness and prosperity is an honest industry, and an humble submission and intire resignation to the wise dispensations of the divine Providence; and not to grasp at any thing that was not intended for us; because, when we do, we are sure of vexation, and disappointment. This querulous and censorious disposition is attended with this farther ill consequence, that it too often degenerates into doubts, and despondency, concerning the providence of God, and concludes in the horrors of despair.

And thus much for the several symptoms of envy. I proceed, in the third place,

III. To inquire into the ill effects of it.

And these are of two sorts, either to the envious person, or to society.

First, To the envious person, and one of these my text expresses, by *rottenness to the bones*. Good-nature operates agreeably, both upon the body and soul; whereas envy wastes and distracts; the eyes are sunk by it, and the countenance becomes haggard, and livid; a secret canker gnaws the heart, and eats into the bones, like a moth fretting a garment. The mind, in the mean time, is in a perpetual ferment, working, and restless, like a troubled sea. A succession of turbulent and unruly passions seize it; all within is in uproar! and conscience and religion lost in the tumult.

But this is not all. The worst effect of envy is, the influence it hath upon the moral state of the mind; it does not only kill our quiet, but our virtue likewise. And the reason is evident. All virtue consists in a social disposition; love and benevolence are the fountains from whence it flows: and therefore when envy once poisons the mind with despite,

and gall, and enmity; may we not justly ask, with St. James, *My brethren, can the same fountain send forth sweet water and bitter?* The soul is called off, by this means, from the noblest objects and inclinations, and perverted to the vilest, and the worst: when, instead of being employed in contriving our own salvation, and promoting the good of mankind, we are busied in projecting calamity, and torture, and affliction, both to ourselves and others. In the mean time death steals fast upon us, and the ends of life are lost and defeated. We live in the world like furies, and we leave it in a condition that renders us unfit for every thing but the conversation of fiends and cursed spirits. And this is one obvious reason, why wicked men are to dwell with devils in another world; because, when once the mind is imbued with the malignity of vice, it is unfitted for every thing but the society of cursed spirits: and it is as impossible for it to derive any consolation from the society of angels and archangels, and all the beatitudes of heaven; as that envy, hatred, and malice, should delight in love, and friendship, and universal charity.

But, 2dly, Another ill effect that envy hath upon the person possessed by it, is, that it exposes him to the just hatred and aversion of all mankind: and therefore it is utterly repugnant to reason, and the common interests of life; because it puts a man upon such methods of obtaining his ends, as must of necessity defeat his own purposes: for no man is self-sufficient, but hath frequent need of the friendship and assistance of others, in all conditions and circumstances of life. And is any man so foolish as to imagine he can procure the friendship, and assistance of others by calumny and abuse, by despite and enmity? This is stupid, and absurd. And therefore envy will be so far from advancing us in the attainment of any one useful purpose of life, that it must of necessity be the greatest clog and impediment to all our endeavours; forasmuch as it will at once deprive us, both of the love of society, and the favour of God, and leave us equally detested and despised of both.

But the ill effects which this pernicious passion hath upon society, are beyond all expression: *it is an unruly evil full of deadly poison*; and spreads its malignant influence wherever it comes. *Wrath is*

cruel, and anger is outrageous; but who is able to stand before envy? saith Solomon. Merit and innocence, the two great securities of peace and happiness, are so far from being shielded against it, that they are the most of all exposed to its malignant assaults, and the sure objects of its fiercest vengeance. Witness the violence of the sons of Jacob, who could sacrifice their own brother to the jealousy of a dreaded superiority, even in a dream. Witness the implacable malice of Saul against David, the man of all the earth he was most obliged to; who had so often saved him and his kingdom from ruin; and was the greatest glory, as well as the greatest security, of his country. It unhinges all the obligations of gratitude and justice, and changes the very tendencies of our nature: it is conscious of its own malignity, and therefore it is impossible to relax it by good offices, because it justly regards all returns of kindness and benevolence to be (as in truth they are) the greatest reproaches to it. In one word, it is for the most part to this one fountain, that faction and strife, murder and hatred, and infamy owe their rise: and therefore it is, that whensoever the apostles speak of it, they never fail to join to it murders, wraths, strifes, malice, evil speakings, &c. to shew that these are all the natural, and almost unavoidable consequences of that passion. Thus St. Paul, (Rom. i. 29.) speaking of the sins of the Gentiles, which were the consequences of their irreligion, mentions, among others, that they were *full of envy*: and then he immediately subjoins *murder, debate, deceit, malignity*. After the same manner, in his 2d epistle to the Corinthians, (xii. 20.) he connects *envyings, mischiefs, strifes, backbitings, whisperings*. St. Peter also connects *envyings and evil speakings*: and St. James assures us, that, *where envying is, there is confusion and every evil work*.—But surely one of the most fatal and lamentable effects of envy is, that it rages greatly and remarkably among persons that are studious of the same honest and laudable attainments: and therefore it were highly to be wished, that those men could be brought to believe, that wherever there is virtue and industry, there will always be a fund of wealth, and power, and honour, sufficient to crown the desires of any possible number of candidates in proportion

portion to their merit : and that the fund of glory will always rise with the number of its competitors. It is in this commerce, as in all others that are wise and well regulated ; the number of fair traders will, in the ordinary course of things, be so far from diminishing that they must increase the wealth of a nation : and every single man, if avarice and private interest do not injuriously interpose, will be a gainer by that increase : at least, it is certainly so in this, however it may hold in commerce of other kinds : forasmuch as in the pursuits of fame from learning, from virtue, from good abilities of any kind, the number of candidates, if envy do not interpose, will always increase the fund of honour and applause : because every man will then have just so many more equal and judicious admirers, as he hath competitors.

IV. I come now to the last thing proposed, which was, to assign the best remedies I can for the cure of this pernicious passion.

And the first rule I shall lay down for the remedy of this evil passion of envy, is, that we settle our opinions of things, and endeavour to take a right estimate of them : we call *evil good*, and *good evil* ; forgetting that the measure by which we are to judge of the true value of all things under heaven, is the price at which we find them rated in the law of God. The laws of God are the eternal standards of good and evil : what they recommend as valuable, or enjoin as wise, to be regarded, are truly so : and what they disclaim as vile, or forbid as noxious, are found in fact to be so. And therefore the observance of these laws hath a direct and natural tendency to health and credit, and happiness of every kind ; and the neglect and transgression of them as directly and naturally tends to misery and misfortune : insomuch that to a man who hath rightly considered his own nature, and the nature of things without him, there cannot be a clearer or more fixed position than this, that the conformity of our actions to the law of God, must naturally tend to make us wise and happy ; and, on the other hand, that sin and folly, and pain, are inseparably connected.

If then we settle our judgment of things according to the law of God, it is a necessary consequence from this, that we correct the erroneous opinion we have of

superfluous wealth. Let us examine, is there any blessing pronounced upon wealth in the holy scriptures ? Not one. There are, indeed, great blessings pronounced upon charity and mercy ; and these blessings are fully insured to us, by being merciful after our power.—*If thou hast much, give plentifully : if thou hast little, do thy diligence gladly to give of that little.* All the great demands of life are within the compass of a very moderate competency : our folly is, that we imagine wealth, that is, in truth, superfluity, to be the standard of all human felicity : whereas, if we judged rightly of things, we should esteem all superfluities to be, as really they are, trifles, that are wholly impertinent to our happiness ; that can administer no one solid pleasure or satisfaction of life, otherwise than by being employed to beneficent and charitable purposes : and, even there, they have no more merit than what is derived from the goodness of the giver's will. They are desirable, or otherwise, according to the wisdom and virtue of the owner : whereas, in the ordinary use, they seldom serve any higher or nobler purposes than ministering fuel to all the unruly passions that tear and distract our lives ; and more particularly to envy, the bane of all felicity : for, as Aristotle justly observes, the more we abound, and the higher we rise in wealth and power, the less can we bear to be equalled, or outdone. Is it possible, then, that a man, in his right senses, can repine because he wants superfluities ; or envy those that have them ? or, in other words, is it possible that any man, in his senses, can repine, that he is freed from the great incitements to pride, and envy, and avarice ; to luxury, and intemperance, and excess ; the great and sure torments of life ?

But, 2dly, The next remedy of envy that I shall mention, is, that we should endeavour to make a right judgment of our own worth and abilities ; and compare our own with the condition of other men as impartially as we can : and if we do this with any degree of equality, we shall find, that there are others in the world, at least as good, as wise, and as valuable, as we are ; and who enjoy stations and advantages they deserve as well : perhaps too we shall find, that if merit were the standard of honour and affluence, we should not abound altogether as much as

we do; and others, that now pay court to us, would be raised to great heights above us; but, at least, we shall have abundant reason to bless God for the advantages of our own condition; and no reason in the world to repine at the advanced condition of others: we shall find abundant reason to conclude, that the several ranks and distinctions of men, are indeed necessary to the government and well-being of the world; but, if we estimate things according to the rules of reason and religion, do not in the least affect our real happiness. In short, we shall find, that nothing in nature is so falsely rated as felicity; that the distribution of it is, in reality, infinitely more equal than is imagined; and that it is not poverty or wealth, knowledge or ignorance, honour or obscurity; but that it is, in truth, virtue and vice, religion and irreligion, good and evil dispositions, that make the great and material differences between the happiness of one man and another.

3dly, Another cure of envy (and what will effectually supersede the necessity of all others) is, to reflect seriously upon the vanity and insignificance of all worldly advantages. My brethren, would any man in his senses envy a poor insect the pride and the pleasure of basking and fluttering for a few hours in the sun? or envy the short-lived flower the pride and the gaiety of those rich delusive colours that blazon it to the eye; our ornament one hour, and the next our aversion; to-day admired, and to-morrow trampled under foot? And shall we envy him, *whose breath is in his nostrils? whose glory fadeth like a flower?* shall we envy him who hath said to corruption, *thou art my father;* and to the worm, *my mother and my sister?* Alas! what are all the favours, either of fortune or princes, but the sun-shine of a few hours, fleeting fast enough of itself in the natural course, and yet frequently overcast before the short day is done? And what are all the vanities of this world but the gaiety of a few fading colours, feeding *the lust of the eye, and the pride of life,* for a season, but with no solid or permanent satisfaction? — Nay more; what is life itself, what is the life of man, more than the life of a flower? Is not *all flesh* (as St. Peter most admirably expresses it, 1 Ep. i. 24.) *as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass? The grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away.*

This once considered as it ought, what have we to do in this world, but to employ the little time allowed us; in the diligent discharge of our duty in that state of life unto which it has pleased God to call us; renouncing all envious reflections and inquiries, all mean and unworthy solicitude about the transient advantages of others; and referring, in all humility, both their concerns, and our own, to the good providence of that God, who debases one man, and exalts another, for wise reasons, not always obvious to us, nor fit they should be? By this means our minds will be prepared for the influence and assistance of the holy spirit of God, and the Holy Ghost will delight to dwell with us, and guide us into all truth. And to this end we ought earnestly and incessantly to pray for God's assistance and direction in all our undertakings; and more particularly, that he would purify our souls from envy, hatred, and malice, and all uncharitableness. And we may be sure God will never be wanting, on his part, to those that are rightly disposed, and capacitate themselves, for his assistance: but it is vain either to hope or beg his aid, in this case, as long as our errors remain with us; as long as wealth and honour are regarded as the greatest goods, and poverty and obscurity as the greatest evils.

In the last place, when we find ourselves inclined to censure the actions and intentions of others, to silence the good, to expose the bad, and malign the innocent and indifferent; in this case, we should remember and imitate the goodness of Almighty God, who takes pleasure in the happiness of his creatures: who knows our infirmities, and hath compassion upon them; and because he delights in the salvation of sinners, deals with us as if he overlooked the evil of our doings, for the sake of even that little portion of good that is in them. This conduct of the divine mercy and goodness it should always be our earnest care, as it will always be our highest glory and happiness, to imitate: and one signal and immediate advantage of it, will be this; that then we shall be so far from repining at the good actions and good fortune of others, that we shall rejoice, and take delight in them; by this means we shall enlarge our capacity of happiness, and be enabled to share in all the felicity we either see, or conceive, others to enjoy: at the same

same time we shall refine and raise our nature, and be fitted for the society of heaven; where the servants and saints of God are delighted with their mutual felicity, and where the happiness of each would be exceedingly impaired, if it were not participated by all; and therefore it is, in this respect, a just and judicious representation which is made to us of heaven, under the image of a musical concert; where all enjoy all, to the extent of their capacity; and where, we all know, the pleasure of the harmony is greatly increased by being communicated. To which region of consummate and unenvied felicity, God of his infinite mercy conduct us all, through the merits and mediation of Jesus Christ.

S E R M O N CIII.

By Bishop BLACKALL.

The Method of making our good Lives useful to others,

MATTH. V. 16.

Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.

IN the three foregoing verses, our Saviour had compared his disciples, first to salt, the chief use of which is to give a relish to meats, and to preserve them from corruption; secondly, to the sun, the benign influence whereof insuseth warmth and life into the lower world; thirdly, to a city on an hill, the high situation whereof is apt to draw men's eyes towards it, and to put them upon inquiring concerning it; and, fourthly, to a lighted candle, which serves for no use, if it be covered with a bushel, or put under a bed; but if it be set (where it ought to be) on a candlestick, gives light to them that are in the house, and supplies, in good measure, the want of that greater light; and here in the text he sums up the main design of all the aforementioned similitudes in a brief and plain exhortation (borrowing an easy metaphor from the similitude that was last named); *Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.*

In discoursing on which words, I intend,

I. To explain the duty here prescribed; and,

II. To urge some motives to persuade to the practice of it.

I. I am to explain the duty here prescribed: *Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.*

And I take it that these words do not directly enjoin any single duty, either of piety, justice, or charity; but they rather suppose, that we are already fully instructed in every duty, and careful to discharge all the parts of an holy and virtuous life; and what they teach and prescribe is, the means and method whereby we may make our constant practice of piety and virtue, as well useful to others, as profitable to ourselves; viz. By so ordering our conversation, that our piety and virtue may become exemplary to others, so that by seeing our good works, they may be incited and encouraged to imitate us therein.

What (I say) the text prescribes, is not this or that particular good work, but a general aim and design that we ought to have in every good work that we do, of instructing and bettering others, and gaining glory to God thereby: that we should not satisfy ourselves with barely doing what we are commanded, but should so contrive the doing of our good works, that God may be glorified, and our neighbour edified: that by the same acts and exercises of piety and virtue, by which we endeavour to work out our own salvation, we should also seek to procure and farther the salvation of other men: that our conversation should be not only innocent, but also discreet; not only such as we can justify to ourselves, but likewise such as we can justify to the world; not only agreeable to the doctrine of the gospel, but also such as may adorn our holy profession, and be apt to gain proselytes to it. This I take to be the general design and meaning of the precept in the text; *Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.*

But this account of the meaning of the text, though it be true, yet is not full and particular enough to direct our practice; because it only shews the aim and design that we ought to have, but does not

not teach us how we may accomplish the same.

In order therefore to the farther and fuller explication of this general precept, and to render it more readily practicable, I shall reduce it to some particulars, by laying down some rules and directions, which it may reasonably be thought are implied in it, and were meant by our Saviour to be hereby enjoined, because they are such as seem to be necessary to be observed, in order to the obtaining of that end, which we are here taught to aim at. And,

1. First of all, this precept, *Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works*, plainly supposes that we ought not to affect a solitary or too much retired life; or (to use our Saviour's own expression in the verse foregoing) that we should not *put our candle under a bushel*, but *on a candlestick*, that it may *give light to them that are in the house*.

For how is it possible that our piety should quicken others, if they do not see it? or that our good example should make them better, if we hide it from them? If therefore it be our duty to *shine as lights in the world*, and by a holy and exemplary life, to endeavour to bring others to a liking and imitation of the same good course (which is certainly what our Saviour here meant to enjoin); it is evident that the way and method to obtain this end, is not to retire from the society of men, and to live alone in a cloister or a desert: this is so very plain, that it cannot be needful to add any thing more for the proof of it.

But nevertheless, because some pious and devout persons have spoken and written largely in the commendation of a private and solitary life, as if that were the most perfect and divine way of living; whence also they have appropriated to such as live thus, the name of Religious, as if all that were not shut up in a cloister, or a cell, were prophane and irreligious, or at least in a much lower form of godliness, and not near so well employed as the others; I think it may not be amiss (for this reason) to enlarge a little upon this subject, and to shew that this solitary and recluse way of living is so far from being more perfect, or more excellent, than the other, that, as it is an argument of weakness to

chuse it, so it is not indeed to be either commended, or even so much as allowed of, in any but such as are weak: for there is no virtue practised by those that live reclusely, but what may also be practised by such as live and converse in the world; but, on the other side, they who live in towns and cities, and converse freely and friendly with other men, have frequent opportunities of exercising many virtues, which they that live reclusely are, for want of such opportunities, not in a capacity to perform.

He indeed who lives all alone in a cave, or a wilderness, having few of those concernments in the world, about which other men are commonly very busily employed, has more time, and greater leisure, for prayer and meditation, and such like private exercises of religion: but seeing we are born for others, as well as for ourselves, and have a duty to perform to our neighbours as well as to God, and are obliged by nature and Christianity to have love for others, and consequently to endeavour to promote their welfare and happiness in this world, and especially to advance, so far as we are able, their spiritual and eternal good; he that chuses a solitary and retired life (even though he lives as well, and does as much good, as it is possible for a man to do in that state) yet while he is diligent in one duty, must neglect, in some measure, another, that is altogether as necessary, or rather more so: for we are told in scripture, that *God will have mercy and not sacrifice*, or mercy rather than sacrifice; and therefore there is no reason why this should be thought a more excellent and perfect way of living than the other.

It is plain, that our blessed Saviour, one end of whose coming into the world was to give us an example of holy life, and who was undoubtedly the most perfect pattern of holiness that ever appeared in the world, did not cloister up himself, or live retired from the rest of the world, except only at some certain times, when he withdrew from company for the freer exercise of his devotions (and that man is indeed too much in company, who is never alone, and too busy, who can spare no time from his secular employments for prayer and meditation; but I say otherwise, our Saviour); affected not a solitary and unactive life;

life; but *went about doing good*, and conversed freely with other men, and disdained not the company of the worst of men, when he was in hope of doing them good by conversing with them: insomuch that, you know, he was upon this account slandered by his enemies, as a *friend of publicans and sinners*. And I would to God we were all such friends to them as he really was, that we would make it our endeavour, as he did, *to seek and to save that which is lost*: but such friends we cannot be to them, such good we cannot do them, if we shun all company, and chuse to live quite alone by ourselves. Our *light cannot shine before men*, if we *cover* it, neither can they see our *good works*, if we purposely hide them from their sight.

Thus much indeed must be granted, that it is very convenient for such as are weak in the faith and not well grounded in their religion; or who, having been before very much corrupted in this wicked world, have newly undertaken a good life, and so are still in great danger of being drawn away to their former evil course, by the persuasion and example of their former wicked companions, (it is, I say, very convenient and advisable for such as these,) to retire from the world for some time, till they shall have confirmed their faith by prayer and consideration, till they shall have broken off their bad acquaintance by sufficient absence, till they shall have weaned themselves from their old and beloved sins by disuse, and till, by continual exercising themselves unto godliness, they shall be grown up to some strength and perfection therein; but when they shall have well served these purposes by their retirement, their solitude is no longer to be commended; it is time for them then to go abroad, and to do good; and much more good they may then do abroad, than they can do in a recluse state. And if after this, that they still chuse to continue in their former retirement, the best thing I think that can be said of them is this, they take up with a lower degree of goodness, when they have a fair opportunity put into their hands of attaining to greater perfection; and that they do not make such improvement of their talent as they might have done: the consequence of which will be, that they will also fall as much short of that great reward which they might have attained,

2. Another rule or direction very requisite to be observed, in order to the obtaining of that end which we are here taught to aim at, viz. the glory of God, in the conversion and salvation of men, and which consequently we may reasonably think was meant to be enjoined by our Saviour in this precept, *Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works*, is this, that we so contrive the doing of our good works before men, that not only the works themselves may be seen, but the goodness of them may likewise appear.

Now the goodness of any work consists in two things; 1. In the matter of it, when the thing itself is good; when it is agreeable to the law of God, when it is a thing that God has commanded to be done: and, 2. In the mind and intention of the doer, when the reason why he does it is, because God has commanded it; when he does it out of a principle of obedience to God, and his only, or at least his chief, design in the doing it, is to recommend himself to God's gracious acceptance.

Now the first of these, viz. whether the work that we do be materially good, is easy to be known by all that see it: but the second, viz. whether we do it with a good design, and out of a right principle, can be known by men (who can judge only by outward appearance) no farther than we ourselves are pleased to discover to them what our design is in it, and what principle we act upon; and therefore that the goodness of our work may be fully seen, it is requisite that our design and principle should (so far as is possible) lie as open to men's views as the action itself.

We ought not therefore to be ever ashamed of owning and professing our religious fear of God; we should not ever be shy of declaring publicly, whenever a proper occasion is offered, that conscience towards God is the principle of all our actions; that the reason why we do this or that, or why we do not otherwise, is because we are persuaded that that is a duty, or this a sin; that it is our firm resolution, not willingly to be wanting in any duty, nor knowingly consent to any sin; and that it is this our steadfast resolution of obedience to the will of God, that inflames us in every thing that we do, and not temporal interest, or any other worldly consideration. This is what ought to be, and this is what, if it really

really be so, we ought not to be ashamed or shy to own, because no action, how good soever in itself, or how publicly soever it be done, is a good example to others, unless it be done, and, if there be a proper occasion, be also owned to be done, upon a right principle, viz. a principle of religion.

Thus, for instance, if a man on any public occasion of charity, as suppose in giving to a brief, should give very largely, but at the same time should declare, that the reason why he gave so much was because his neighbours, of the same quality and degree with himself, had given so; he would not in this act of charity give any example of charity, but only of complaisance or worldly prudence: for in declaring that he gave so much, only because others had given so, he does in effect declare, that if little had been given by others, he would have given less than he did, and that if others had given nothing, neither would he: and if so, it is plain his gift was not a fruit or effect of charity, but only an act of neighbourly compliance; that he did not give what he gave out of pity and compassion to his necessitous brother, but only to avoid the imputation of avarice; that he did not give because he thought it was his duty to give, but because he thought it would have been a discredit to him not to have given as others had done: so that his alms, which considered in itself was really a work of charity, yet being given upon these worldly considerations, was not an act of charity in him, nor an example of charity to others.

Or thus, again: if a man that is really sober and temperate out of duty to God, yet does not own that this is his principle, and that the reason why he is always careful to keep himself sober is, because he will not commit a sin; his act of sobriety is no example of sobriety. Nay, on the contrary, if when he refuses to stay longer with those who, he sees, design a drunken bout, he only pretends urgent business as the reason of his leaving them so soon; or, if staying still in their company, he nevertheless stiffly refuses to drink with them to excess, pretending only weakness, or indisposition of body, as the reason of his refusing his cup; in thus leaving them, or thus refusing to keep the round with them, he is so far from giving to others an example

of temperance, that he rather gives them an example of the contrary. For when he only pretends business as the reason of his leaving them, he does as good as say, that if he had not such urgent business to call him away, he would have staid longer with them: and when he pretends only indisposition of body, as the reason of his refusing the cup, he does in effect grant that, if he had not been so indisposed, he would have kept pace with them in their excess; which tacit concession of his affords greater encouragement to them to continue their excess, and to others to follow the same course, than his own personal sobriety, which they have reason to believe is grounded only upon temporal and prudential considerations, does to make them sober out of a principle of conscience: and that sobriety which is not grounded upon a sense of duty, and a fear of offending God, is not the virtue of sobriety, nor properly a good work.

So that if what the man pretends be true, and it be indeed only business, or care of his health, that keeps him sober, his sobriety being apparently no virtue in him, cannot be an example of virtue to others. Nay, supposing the contrary, viz. that conscience, and a fear of offending God, be indeed the true reason of his sobriety, yet while he gives out only those other reasons, though his work be manifest, yet the whole goodness of it is concealed; and so all that others can learn from his example, is only to mind their business, or to take care of their health, and not the virtue of sobriety, for that he purposely conceals and hides from them, and seems unwilling that they should discover it.

From all which it appears, that those good works only are exemplary, the causes whereof are as visible as the actions themselves, when it is not more manifest that we do the thing that is good, than it is that we do it out of a religious principle; and consequently, that to the discharge of the precept in the text, the gaining glory to God by the exemplariness of our lives, it is requisite not only that our work be materially good, and that it be done in the sight and presence of others, that they may take example by it; but also that we freely own and declare to the whole world, that we do it out of conscience towards God, and not

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out of any worldly consideration. Following herein the example of the patriarch Joseph, who being earnestly solicited by his mistress to lie with her, thought it not enough barely to resist the temptation, or to give out; as the reason of his not consenting (which yet he might have done, and a good reason enough, if there had been no other, it would have been) the danger that there was of his master's discovering their dishonesty, and the great mischief that might thence accrue to both of them: but laid the stress of the business where it ought to be laid; *How can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?*

And this is truly to give good example; this is to *Let our light so shine before men, that they may see our good works*, viz. when we not only do what is good, but also boldly own the religious principle that influences our lives.

And indeed, on the other side, if while we are really the servants of God, we are yet ashamed to appear so, and are unwilling to be thought so by others; and although we do the things that God commands, because he commands them, would yet rather have it thought that we do them upon other accounts; as if we reckoned that it would be a shame, and a disparagement to us to be taken for men of religion and conscience; we may justly fear that our good works will in the event be as unprofitable to ourselves as they are to others, and may reasonably look to be punished for them rather than rewarded: according to that threatening of our Saviour in Mark, viii. 28. *Whoever shall be ashamed of me and of my words, in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him shall the Son of Man be ashamed, when he cometh in the glory of his Father, with the holy angels.*

3. Another thing requisite to make our piety and virtue exemplary, and to excite and stir up others to an imitation of it, (and which consequently may well be understood as a direction meant to be concluded in this general precept, *Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works*;) is this, that we should endeavour all we can, by our own prudent carriage and behaviour, to make piety and virtue seem amiable and lovely in the eyes of men. And then true virtue and goodness makes the best shew, and appears most amiable, when it is shewn

simply in its own proper shape and colour, without any of that artificial clothing, wherewith it is commonly dressed up by hypocrites, and such as pretend to more religion than they really have.

Nay, indeed, I believe there is nothing in the world that does more prejudice some men against religion, than that false notion of it, which they happen to have taken up from observing the carriage and behaviour of those hypocritical pretenders to it: for they see that those who make the loudest noise about religion, are very commonly men of sour tempers, of melancholic looks, of severe and grave deportment: that they affect to talk all in scripture-phrases, and to thrust in religious discourse (as we use to say) by head and shoulders; that they are severe censurers of others, and will not allow of a jest, or a smile, or any pleasantness in conversation, as favouring of too great lightness; that they condemn, as unlawful, even the most innocent recreations and diversions, and seem to judge all that time mispent, which is not employed in prayer or reading, or in some such godly exercise: such, I say, they observe, is the carriage and behaviour of many of those who make the loudest pretences to religion, and assume to themselves, exclusively of all others, the name of the godly party; and so forming a notion of religion, from thence they become greatly prejudiced against it. And if this be religion, it is a thing that they can by no means ever like or approve of: for they, it may be, are naturally of a sanguine complexion, and of a cheerful temper; and if they cannot be religious and cheerful too, they had rather be without religion than have their tempers spoiled by it; or they, it may be, are as yet in the heat of youth, their spirits are light and active, and they have a quick sense of pleasure; and therefore, if they cannot be religious without bidding adieu to all mirth and delight, and becoming as grave and serious as old people naturally are, they will even put off all thoughts of religion to that age of gravity and seriousness, which they think is fittest for it, and suits best with it.

But now all this dislike of religion is in truth grounded upon a false and mistaken notion of it; and religion itself is not such a bugbear as it appeared to them in that hypo-

hypocritical dress, in which they happened to view it: for a man may be virtuous, and yet pleasant; he may be strictly religious, and yet cheerful; he may be truly and thoroughly a good man, and yet appear in dress, in garb, in look, in common discourse and conversation, and the like, just as other men do; he may be a very good christian, and yet not cease to be a good companion; and, in fine, he may, even in his youth, put on all the gravity of a Christian, and yet not put on that sourness and moroseness which is oftentimes the infirmity of old age. For true religion does not consist in a peculiar garb, in an affected phrase, in a singular behaviour, in a down look, in sighing and sobbing, and a whining tone, and such like fooleries, but in the rational and manly worship of the true God, and in an hearty love and good-will to men. *He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord thy God require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?* And in all this there is nothing that men can dislike, I am sure there is nothing therein that they can despise.

If therefore we would have our *light so shine before men*, that they seeing our *good works*, may be incited to imitate our example; if we would gain proselytes to virtue and religion, we should not (at least not in our public behaviour) affect needless austerities; we should take care that religion do not (as it does in a great many) sour our tempers, and make us peevish, froward, and ill-natured; we should be as complaisant to others as we can be with a good conscience, and endeavour to please all men, as far as we can do it without offending God. We should rather sometimes take part with others in their innocent sports and recreations, (though to do so be against our own inclination,) than, by our studiously and constantly avoiding the same, give them occasion to think that religion condemns all sport and recreation. We should rather sometimes even force ourselves to mirth and pleasantness, (although our own temper be naturally grave and melancholic,) than give them occasion to think, that our melancholy is the effect of our religion; and that a man cannot be religious and cheerful too.

Thus, I say, we should endeavour (as St. Paul exhorts) to *please every man his brother, for his good, to his edification*: we

should endeavour all ways, as well by our example as discourse, to represent religion under the most lovely character; we should carefully avoid giving any occasion to men to think that they cannot be truly religious without bidding adieu to all the delights and pleasures of this life; or that they cannot be the faithful servants of God, without rendering themselves justly ridiculous to the world for their humourfome and fantastical singularity. Thus, I say, we should endeavour, both by our discourse and by our own wise conversation, to beget a true and lovely notion of religion in men's minds: this is the way to adorn our profession, this is the likeliest means we can use to induce other men to embrace it.

For when men shall see that they may be both merry and wise, that they may be truly religious, and yet not be always talking of religion; that they may be strictly conscientious, and yet not nicely scrupulous; that they may be in every respect good men, and yet not be ridiculous for their preciseness; and, in a word, that they may have their conversation in heaven, and yet not be unfit for conversation upon earth; it may reasonably be hoped, that such a fair representation of religion as this will induce a great many to become proselytes to it, and that *seeing our good works*, they will be persuaded to become followers of the same.

In order to which it is farther requisite, (and therefore this may be laid down as another rule or direction meant to be prescribed in this general precept, *Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works*;) it is farther requisite, I say,

4. That with a general care to order our whole conversation aright, so as not to give ill example in any thing, we should have a special regard to those duties of religion which are of a public nature, and proper to be performed in the sight and presence of other men, and that we be strictly regular and constant in the performance of them.

Such especially is the public worship of God, in those times, and at those places, which are appointed for it; which therefore cannot at proper opportunities be neglected, or without reasonable excuse omitted, without breach of the precept in the text, commanding us to *let our light shine before men*. *Let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works,*

works, says the author to the Hebrews, chap. x. 24. which precept is in sense and effect the same with this in the text, *Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works*; and then he adds immediately, as one special instance of this duty, the duly frequenting the public assemblies, for the worship of God; *Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is*.

And this they should do well to consider seriously of, who upon any trifling occasion, and many times upon no occasion at all, do keep from church.

For though they should use all the same prayers at home, or in their closets, that are used in the church, and though they should read at home the very same portions of scripture that are read there, and though they should pass the rest of the church-time at home in the reading of some good book, treating perhaps of the very same subject that is treated of by the minister in the church, (and yet I fear there are but few of those that make a custom of staying from church, who do ordinarily spend the church-time at home so well as this; but, I say, if they should always employ themselves thus at their homes in the hours of public worship,) yet this however would not be quite so well as if they had been then at church. For, even supposing that by thus employing themselves at home in the church-time, they might edify themselves as much as they might have done at church, (which yet is not true,) it is plain however that they do not thereby so much edify their neighbours: they may get a great deal of good to themselves by these private exercises of religion, but they do no good at all thereby to others: their prayers, and their reading, may profit themselves much, but their example cannot profit the world; their *candle*, though it burns clear, and shines bright, yet being *hid* thus *under a bushel*, when it ought to have been set on a *candlestick*, gives no light to their neighbours. So that in doing for substance all the same things at home, which should have been done at church, they perform but only half their duty, being at the same time manifestly deficient in that other half which is here enjoined, making *their light so shine before men, that others, seeing their good works, may glorify their Father which is in heaven*.

5. Lastly, as there are some duties of our religion of a public nature, and which therefore are not at all exemplary unless they be done in public; so there are others which have a peculiar aptness to procure love and esteem to them that practise them, and in consequence to procure a liking and esteem also to that religion which teaches and enjoins them: in order therefore to the attaining of that end which we are here directed to aim at, viz. the gaining glory to God by the exemplariness of our lives, it is more especially requisite, that we give our minds to the study and exercise of these virtues.

But it would take up too much time now to inquire what these virtues are, and to shew how much our religion is adorned and credited, and commended thereby; and therefore I shall defer the handling of this head, with what else remains, to another opportunity.

S E R M O N CIV.

The Method of making our good Lives useful to others; and the Motives to it.

MATTH. V. 16.

Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.

THESE words (as I have already noted) contain the practical inference or conclusion which our Saviour draws from the three foregoing verses, wherein he had compared his disciples to salt, to the sun, to a *city on an hill*, and to a *lighted candle*; and especially from the last verse of these three, wherein having noted the incongruity of covering a *candle* with a *busnel*, and the usefulness thereof when set on a candlestick, he here, borrowing a metaphor from that similitude, infers a duty incumbent on all his disciples, viz. to be of the like use to the rest of the world, by the exemplariness of their lives, that a *candle* set on a *candlestick* is to those that dwell in the house; *Let your light, &c.*

In discoursing on which words I proposed to do these two things:

I. To explain the duty here prescribed: And,

II. To urge some motives to persuade to the practice of it.

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I. To explain the duty here prescribed; and this I proposed to do by reducing this general precept, to some more particular rules and directions; such as it may reasonably be thought were meant by our Saviour to be hereby enjoined, because they are such as seem necessary to be observed, in order to the attaining of that end which we are here taught to aim at.

And four of these directions I have already mentioned, and treated of, viz.

1. That we should not affect a solitary and too much retired life; to do so is truly to *put the candle under a bushel*.

2. That we should be always free in owning the religious principle that influences our lives; that so not only the works themselves that we do, but also the goodness of them, may appear.

3. That we should endeavour by our own prudent carriage and behaviour, and particularly by avoiding all needless austerities and affected singularities, to beget in men's minds such a notion of religion, as may not be scaring and discouraging to them, such as may make it appear to them (as indeed true religion is) manly, and rational, and worthy of their choice. And,

4. That we should be, especially, strictly regular and constant in the performance of all those duties of religion which are of a public nature, and are proper to be performed in the sight and presence of others.

I add now, in the fifth and last place,

5. That there being some duties of our holy religion, which have a special aptness to procure love and esteem to them that practise them, and by consequence to procure also a good liking to that religion which teaches and enjoins them, this precept of our Saviour, commanding us to *let our light shine before men*, may reasonably be understood as meaning to enjoin a particular care, and a more than ordinary strictness and constancy, in the discharge of all such duties.

And to this purpose is that exhortation of the apostle in Phil. iv. 8. *Whatsoever things are true*, that is, evidently and undeniably good; *whatsoever things are honest*, that is, decent, comely, or venerable; *whatsoever things are just*, that

is, manifestly reasonable, fair, or equitable; *whatsoever things are pure*, that is, cleanly and graceful; and for that reason delightful to the beholders; *whatsoever things are lovely*, that is, apt and likely to render a man beloved by his neighbours, and well accepted to those among whom he lives; *whatsoever things are of good report*, that is, are generally well spoken of, and apt to procure the good word of others; *if there be any virtue*, that is, any practice, the goodness whereof is so clearly evident by the light of nature; as to be readily acknowledged by all; and *if there be any praise*, that is, any practice that is universally esteemed laudable and praise-worthy; *think on these things*, that is, let your thoughts be chiefly fixed upon, and your endeavours chiefly bent to these; give your minds to the study and exercise of these virtues above all others.

And the reason of this advice is plain, viz. because though there is indeed no virtue or good work of any kind that may be neglected without sin, yet other virtues are necessary only as duties that are necessary to be done, only because we cannot discharge a good conscience towards God, while we are failing in them; but these, these lovely, these honourable virtues, these works of good report, these virtues and graces which attract esteem, and procure veneration and respect; these, I say, are necessary not only as duties to which we are directly obliged by those particular precepts which enjoin them; but likewise as ornaments and graces to our profession, as serving to beget in others a liking to our religion, as a good means to help to spread and propagate it in the world, and to make proselytes to it. By these we do not only exercise that religion which we profess, but we commend and adorn it: according to that exhortation of the same apostle in Tit. ii. 10. *to adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things*.

And it may be considered that that exhortation is there especially given to servants, that is, to persons of the lowest rank and meanest condition: now certainly, if it was the duty even of these to endeavour to adorn that holy religion which they professed, it is much rather the duty of those who are of better fashion and superior degree, to do the same; that is, of masters of families, of great men, of magistrates, of all that

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are advanced high in dignity above others, or have power and authority over others : such as these are more especially obliged to adorn the religion which they profess, because they are of all others in the best capacity of doing it, because their examples lie most open to be taken notice of, and are most likely to have an influence upon others.

It is therefore plainly the duty of all Christians; for if it be even of the lowest, (as the apostle there expressly teaches,) much rather is it so of those who are in an higher station, to *adorn the doctrine of Christ*, that is, by the beauty and orderliness of their lives, to endeavour to make that religion which they are governed by, appear worthy of all acceptation, and thereby to prepossess men in its favour; that so they may hear, with an inclination and desire to be convinced (or at least without any prejudice) those arguments that are offered for the proof of it; which if they do, they cannot fail to be convinced by them.

And therefore there being (as was said) some christian virtues and graces, which have a peculiar beauty and comeliness, which approve themselves to every man's conscience, which as being amiable even at the first sight, and universally praised and spoken well of, have a special aptness to beget a liking and esteem, and a sort of prejudice for that religion which enjoins the practice of them, it is plainly our duty (and a duty which the precept in the text commanding us to make our *light shine before men*, meant to lay upon us) to have, in the course of our lives, a particular regard to these virtues, and a special care not to be deficient therein: and of this kind are these four which follow; I do not mean these only, (for there is a beauty and gratefulness in every christian virtue,) but I mean these more especially, viz. temperance, justice, meekness, and charity.

1. Temperance, or moderation in the use of meats and drinks. This is not only a necessary duty of Christianity, but it is also plainly an ornamental virtue; it renders lovely and beautiful the person that is endued with it; it makes him respected and revered by all that know him: for a man that eats and drinks only for necessity, to repair the daily decays of his body, not to please his palate, not to satisfy the cravings of a lux-

uriant and extravagant appetite, lives as becomes a man, and upholds the dignity of his nature, and maintains that dominion which the rational part of him, his soul, ought to have over the brutish part of him, his body. Hence when we would give a good character of any person in one word, we often do it by this, we say he is a very sober man, and in saying this of him, we think we say enough to recommend him to the esteem and respect of all: for if he be a sober man, he is one that has his wits and his reason always about him: he is therefore fit to be employed in any business he is capable of, and will not fail the expectation of those that employ him: whereas an intemperate person, who is a slave to his palate, and drinks away his reason, turns a wise man into a fool, and a man into a beast; and is therefore more vile and despicable than other fools, and than other beasts, because his folly or want of reason is the effect of his own vicious choice, whereas theirs was the lot of their creation.

Such is the natural turpitude of the sins of intemperance, that even they that do too freely allow themselves therein, yet cannot hardly but be sensible that their way of life is a reproach and a discredit to them; and therefore very rarely (unless they are hardened in their wickedness, and past all shame) do they care that the world should know what sort of men they are. *They that be drunken, are drunken in the night*, says the apostle. And if upon any occasion a character were to be given of them, they would take it heinously ill of him who should make (though very truly) their drunkenness a part of their character.

But a part of their character it must be, if it be true; because it is what with all their care and endeavour they cannot conceal from the knowledge of the world: and that is another reason why it should be thought, that, by this precept, commanding us to be good examples to others, we are more especially obliged to the practice of temperance, viz. because the vices of intemperance are, of all others, most manifestly contrary to good example, upon this account, because they cannot be hid; because the natural effects of them, which are evident to all, I mean that sottishness, that stupidity, that ridiculous folly and childishness,

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which they introduce, plainly discover to all the cause by which they are produced: so that how close and secret soever the man might be in the act of intemperance, it is nevertheless as public as if it had been acted in all those streets which he afterwards passes through, or in all those companies which he afterwards happens to be in; for his sottish look, his wry walk, his trembling hand, his ridiculous and antic behaviour, his faltering or broken speech, his profane, obscene, or foolish talk, every thing that he says, tells, and every thing that he does, shews the world where he has been, and how he has been employed. So that a man cannot be intemperate, especially in drinking, but he must be scandalously so; and what is commonly said of him, (unless he be one that is quarrelsome in his drink,) that he is nobody's foe but his own, is most evidently false, for he hurts every body that knows him, or converses with him; at least, there is great danger that they may be infected by his ill example: and by the scandalousness of his behaviour he also brings a reproach and disparagement upon the holy religion which he professes.

2. Another very graceful and adorning virtue, the practice whereof is apt to render a man beloved and respected by all those among whom he lives, and by consequence to beget also in others a good liking to, and a high esteem for that religion by which he is influenced and governed, is justice; exact justice and honesty in all our dealings, and faithfulness in discharging all our trusts. And therefore in the place already cited, Tit. ii. 10. where christian servants are exhorted to grace their profession, this way of their doing it is particularly mentioned. *Not purloining, but shewing all good fidelity, that they may adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things.*

In order, therefore, to the obtaining that end, which in the text all Christians are required to aim at, that is, that we may gain glory to God, by making the light of our good example to shine before men, there is plainly nothing more needful than this, that we be square and exact in all our dealings, punctual in the performance of all our promises, and faithful in the execution of all our trusts.

For whatever opinion or persuasion men are of in the speculative points of religion,

justice and truth, fidelity, and fair dealing, are what all people like, approve, and commend, at least in others; and even they who for filthy lucre's sake allow themselves in the practice of fraud and falsehood, yet dare not offer to justify their own practice; they may find their injustice gainful, but they cannot think it reputable: what they chiefly trust to is their cunning, by which they hope they may so contrive their doing of wrong, as not to be found out: but if it should be discovered, they are sensible it must bring upon them an indelible reproach.

There being therefore a great many religions, and sects of religion, in the world; and the greatest part of mankind being not in a capacity, or not having leisure enough to examine into the several grounds of each of them, there is plainly nothing that can more recommend any religion to the general good liking of such as are ignorant of the grounds and reasons of it, than the remarkable justice, truth, and fidelity of those that profess it: for these social virtues being commendable among all, and of daily use, if there be any one sort or sect of religious professors that is remarkable above the rest for the constant exercise of them, all indifferent and discreet persons will, for this reason only, have a better opinion of them than of the rest; and will be readily inclined to think, that theirs is the best religion, because it makes them honest men than the rest are.

And this, without doubt, was one great help towards the spreading of Christianity in the world so very fast as it did spread at the first preaching of the gospel. It was then seen and observed by all, that as many as gave up their names to Christ, though they had been before thieves and covetous, unjust and extortioners, did immediately upon their embracing Christianity, become quite other men; so that it could not be doubted but that this change in their manner of life was wrought by the power of that religion which they had newly embraced; and the observation of this quickly begat in such as were well disposed, a general good liking to the religion, even before they had been instructed in the grounds and reasons of it, and inclined them to give a ready ear to the proofs that were offered of its truth and divinity; and, these being very strong and

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But the arguments for the truth of the christian religion are the same now as formerly, and as strong now as ever, and yet now we see they prevail little or nothing; very few converts to Christianity are now ever heard of: for which, I believe, a better reason can hardly be given than this, that though Christianity be the same excellent religion that it was then, the lives and manners of Christians now-a-days are not so excellent as they were formerly; so that, (to keep to the point I am now speaking of,) though there has been in these last ages, by reason of the great increase of trade and navigation, a much better opportunity of spreading Christianity into the remote parts of the world, than ever there was heretofore; yet this opportunity has rather hindered the growth of Christianity, than promoted it; and all for want of that truth and fidelity, and that just and fair dealing in trade, which our religion indeed strictly enjoins, but few that outwardly profess Christianity, do now make much conscience to practise. For how is it likely, that a Turk, a Heathen, or an Indian, should have any inclination to turn Christian, when he sees (and, I fear, it is a thing too often to be seen) that those Christians with whom he trades, are not so fair in their bargains, so true in their assertions, so faithful to their promises, and so square and honest in their dealings, as many even of the infidels themselves are? What reasonable inducement can he have to lend a willing ear to those arguments whereby the Christian would persuade him to embrace Christianity, when, as he may well think (judging of the nature of the religion from the manners of those that profess it) he cannot embrace it without renouncing those principles of moral justice and honesty, which were taught him by the light of nature only?

This therefore is a matter that highly concerns us all (though indeed more especially those that travel into foreign parts, or have any traffic or dealings with men of other religions) to take special care of, viz. that we do not by any falsehood or injustice in our dealings with them, prejudice them against our religion, or give them occasion to blaspheme it.

But let us revive that truth and justice, that honesty and fidelity, that uprightness and singleness of heart, which the Christians in the primitive times were such eminent examples of; and then we may hope to see now a more speedy and general conversion of men to our most holy faith than ever there has been in former ages; then may we look for a quick and punctual accomplishment of those many ancient prophecies in the Old Testament, as well as New, concerning the enlargement of the kingdom of Christ, upon which we ground a hope that there will be yet, before the end of the world, a general conversion of all nations to the christian religion.

3. Another christian grace or virtue highly ornamental to all that are endued with it, is meekness or humility, together with all the branches and expressions, all the fruits and effects thereof; every one of which is lovely and amiable, and apt to endear, and render beloved and respected, the person in whom they are observed; such are, gentleness, good temper, easiness of access, affability in discourse, courteous behaviour, a readiness to do kindness, contentedness in our condition, orderliness in our station, and the like.

These branches and fruits of humility, of mind and carriage, are every one of them exceedingly taking, and very apt to procure love and esteem; they are all of general good report; they are commended and spoken well of by all; so that there can be nothing more proper to recommend our holy religion to men's esteem, than the careful practice and exercise of these virtues: for even they who know nothing of the grounds and reasons of our religion, yet cannot but see and acknowledge, that it is a religion worthy of God, when they observe how much it does adorn and beautify the lives of those that are influenced by it; when they take notice how orderly and useful it makes them in every state and condition of life that they are in; and a general liking of our religion, and a good inclination towards it, must render them much more easy to be persuaded of its truth.

And accordingly we may observe, that there is not any motive whereby, in the sacred writings, we are more frequently

exhorted to the practice and exercise of these virtues of humility, than we are by the consideration of that love and esteem that they will gain to us, and that credit and reputation which they will, in consequence, procure to our religion.

Thus in 1 Pet. v. 5. we are exhorted in general to *be clothed with humility*; by which expression it is intimated, that humility does adorn and set us off in the eyes of men, more than any dress or apparel can do. And the same thing is again intimated in the third chapter of that epistle, at the 3d and 4th verses, where the apostle, reproving the vanity of women, in affecting to set themselves off by a fine dress, hath these words: *whose adorning let it not be that outward adorning of plaiting the hair, and of wearing of gold, or of putting on of apparel; but let it be the hidden man of the heart, in that which is not corruptible, even the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit. — For after this manner in old time the holy women adorned themselves.* And this same advice is also given them by St. Paul, in 1 Tim. ii. 9. *Let women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with shamefacedness and sobriety.* In all which places, modesty and humility, and the lovely fruits of these graces in the outward behaviour, are recommended as the best ornaments to set ourselves off in the eye of the world, and to gain to ourselves universal love and respect.

And what love and respect we gain to ourselves by these virtues, we do, by consequence, also gain to our religion: for the same things for which we ourselves are commended and beloved, our religion, which has this good influence upon our behaviour, will likewise be approved and well-spoken of. And therefore in other places these same virtues are persuaded to by that consideration, viz. that thereby we shall procure a fair esteem, and a general good liking to our religion. Thus in 1 Pet. iii. 1, 2. that same modesty which in the two next verses is recommended to women, as an ornament to themselves, is there persuaded to, as what would likewise adorn and recommend their religion. *Likewise, ye wives, be in subjection to your own husbands, that if any obey not the word, they also may, without the word, be won by the conversation of the wives; while they behold your chaste conversation coupled with*

fear. And thus also servants are exhorted to be subject and obedient to their masters, (which is a fruit of humility,) that thereby they may prevent that blame which would be cast upon the christian religion, if those that embraced it should behave themselves disorderly in the stations wherein Providence had placed them. 1 Tim. vi. 1. *Let as many servants as are under the yoke count their masters worthy of all honour, that the name of God, and his doctrine be not blasphemed.* And, *Exhort servants to be obedient unto their own masters, and to please them well in all things — that they may adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour,* says the same apostle, Tit. ii. 9, 10.

4. Lastly, Another virtue or grace, in the exercise whereof it is our duty to be very constant and exemplary, thereby to procure love and esteem to ourselves, and by consequence, credit and liking to our holy religion, is charity, as it includes all the offices of kindness and compassion, all the acts and expressions of bounty and beneficence.

The diligent practice of all virtues of this kind is so manifestly comprehended in this general precept; *Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven*; that our church in the offertory of the communion service has placed this text among those other portions of holy scripture, whereby she means to exhort to works of mercy and charity; as if she thought that this was the prime meaning of it, or rather the only thing intended by it, that we should abound in works of mercy and charity; with an aim to gain glory to God, and reputation to our religion thereby.

And if this was not the only thing here meant, (as indeed I believe it was not,) it is nevertheless, most undoubtedly, a considerable part and a main ingredient of the general duty hereby prescribed; there being no one duty of Christianity that does so much adorn our profession as this; no grace or virtue that singly does so much tend to commend our holy religion to the esteem and practice of those that are yet aliens to it, as that diffusive bounty and unlimited charity, which is enjoined by it, and carefully practised by all the true possessors of it. For by this, says our Saviour, *shall all men know that ye are my disciples*

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It was this, I mean the remarkable bounty and charity of the primitive Christians, which brought Christianity into credit at first, as much, nay perhaps more, than the frequent miracles that were then wrought for the confirmation of it: for miracles may be counterfeited; and miracles have been wrought, or at least have seemed to be so, by false prophets, for the confirmation of a false religion: but there could be no reasonable cause to doubt, but that that religion was from God, which, besides its confirmation by miracles, did so manifestly better the tempers of all those that embraced it, which made them so kind and loving, and so ready to do all good, not only to one another, but even to their enemies and persecutors: which disposed them to spend their time and their wealth; to procure the ease, the comfort, and the happiness of their neighbours; which made them readily to sell even houses and lands, and divest themselves of all, when less than all that the rich had was not sufficient to supply the necessities of the poor; and, in a word, which made them in their temper, disposition, and practice, so like to God himself, of whom we have all this natural notion, that he is an infinitely kind, good, merciful, benevolent, and beneficent being.

And by the same means by which Christianity first gained credit in the world, by the same, I say, must the reputation thereof be upheld; that is, by our abounding in works of mercy and charity.

All other virtues and graces do really make us better in ourselves; but it is charity which chiefly, and more than any other single grace, makes us appear better to others: this attracts love and esteem from all that behold it; and they that like not our christian profession for its own sake, because it lays such restraints upon them as they are unwilling to be under, yet cannot chuse but like it for those manifold goodly fruits and effects of charity which it produces in the world.

And now having, as I suppose, said enough for the explication of the duty here enjoined, I should have gone on immediately to urge some motives to induce to the practice of it, but that there is one difficulty in the way which seems necessary to be first removed, and that is

this; that the precept in the text, *Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works*, and the explication thereof which has been now given, have an appearance of directly contradicting what our Saviour teaches in the next chapter: for there, at the first verse, he bids us *take heed that we do not our alms before men to be seen of them*; at the fifth verse he commands us, *when we pray, not to be as the hypocrites are, who love to stand praying in the synagogues, and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men*; but to enter into our closet, and to shut the door, and to pray to our Father in secret: and at the sixteenth verse, he condemns the hypocrites, who, *when they fast, are of a sad countenance, that they may appear unto men to fast*; and commands his disciples to put on them the same look that they have at other times, that they *appear not unto men to fast, but unto their Father, which is in secret*.

Now how, it may be asked, are these things reconcileable? How can we be as public in the doing of our good works as we are here, and yet as private and secret as we are there directed to be? How can we *let our light so shine before men that they may see our good works*, and yet *not do our righteousness before men, to be seen of them*?

But this difficulty will, I suppose, be clearly removed, and these texts easily reconciled, by considering these two things:

1. That what our Saviour there condemns in the Pharisees, and forbids in his disciples, was not their doing in public such acts of virtue and religion as were of a public nature, but their publishing and proclaiming those which ought to have been kept secret: for he does not blame them for praying publicly in the temple, at the hours appointed for prayer; but only for putting up their private petitions (which were more proper for a closet) in places of public concourse, and *in the corners of the streets*: neither does he condemn them for appearing to fast on a public fast-day, but only for publishing their private fasts.

Now these are clearly distinct things, and both good in their proper seasons: for it is necessary sometimes to give alms publicly, to give a good example of charity to others; and all other times to give alms privately, to approve our sincerity to God, and our

own consciences : it is necessary sometimes to pray publicly in the church, the place appointed for divine worship, *in the assemblies of the upright, and with the congregation* ; thereby to own publicly our dependance upon God, to confess his name before men, and by our united prayers to obtain at his hands public blessings : but when our confessions or petitions are more peculiar to ourselves, then a closet, with the door shut, is a more proper place than the corner of a street, or than even the temple itself. And thus also, lastly, it is necessary sometimes, viz. on days appointed for solemn fasting, to fast publicly, and to appear to do so : and at other times to keep private fasts between God and ourselves, and let the world know nothing of them. These duties therefore being clearly distinct, and both necessary in their respectively proper seasons, the text which commands the public, and those other places in the next chapter, which command the private exercises of religion, are by no means contrary or repugnant to each other.

2. It may be considered farther, that the ground and reason for which our Saviour here in the text commands the public exercise of religion and virtue, and for which hypocrites do make a public shew of more religion and virtue than really they have, are clearly different : for they, when they give an alms, *sounded a trumpet*, and called together a concourse of people to see them ; and when they prayed, they purposely chose such places to pray in as were most in view ; and whenever they fasted, they took care, by *disfiguring their faces*, to let the world know it. And why ? Our Saviour tells us, that they did all this, that they might have glory of men : this was their ultimate end, to gain praise and applause to themselves, and to advance their worldly interest thereby : and we also (we are plainly so commanded in the text) are to make our *light to so shine before men that they may see our good works*, but not to the intent that we ourselves may gain honour and reputation thereby, not that we *may have glory of men* (for if that be our only or ultimate end, that will be also our only reward). But what we are to aim at in so *letting our light to shine before men*, is a much greater and nobler design ; not merely that we

ourselves may appear more glorious, but that so being, and so appearing, our light may serve to direct, and our example to instruct others ; what we are ultimately to aim at, is not that we ourselves may have glory of men, but that God may be glorified in us, that men *seeing our good works*, may glorify our Father, *which is in heaven*.

And this makes a very clear and wide difference between the practice which our Saviour here commands, and that which in the next chapter he condemns : the actions are indeed to appearance the same, but the ends are clearly different. The hypocrite does his works that they may be seen of men, with no farther view but to gain praise and applause to himself, *God is not in all his thoughts* : and the good Christian likewise so does his works that they be seen of men, but not with any, much less with only a selfish design ; but he does the works because God has commanded them, and he does all the same good works at other times when he knows he is seen by none but God ; and when he chuses to do them in the sight of the world, as judging it most proper so to do, yet even then it is only that other men may by his example be taught and encouraged to do the same, and that God may thereby be more glorified.

This difficulty therefore being thus removed, I come now to what I proposed to do in the second place, viz.

II. To urge some motives to the practice of the duty here laid upon us ; *Let your light, &c.* And to avoid tediousness, I shall at present urge no other but what are suggested in the last words of the text, *That they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven*. In which words the highly probable effect of our practising the duty is hinted at as a good reason to engage us to it. As if it had been said, " If you are careful to make your *light so shine before men*, that they may see your good works, they will so clearly discern the beauty of holiness and virtue in your example, as to be in love with it, and so be incited to imitate and resemble you therein ; the blessed consequence of which will be, that God will be glorified in their conversion and salvation."

And the natural tendency of good example to provoke others to good works, and the

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the great probability there is that it will have this effect upon some at least, if not upon all that see it, is indeed a very powerful inducement to the discharge of the duty here enjoined; because if it has this effect, we shall by thus *letting our light shine before men*, bring the greatest glory to God, do the greatest kindness to our neighbour, and obtain the most ample reward to ourselves: any one of which considerations alone is, and therefore much rather are they all together, sufficient to engage to the careful practice of this duty.

1. I say we shall thereby bring the greatest glory to God: for if we can, by our good example, be a means of converting those that see our good works, from a course of sin to a life of righteousness, the consequence of that will be, (1.) That God will be glorified by their mouths; they upon whom this blessed change is wrought, will have great cause to magnify and praise the name of God, for his grace and goodness to them: (2.) That he will be glorified in their lives, which they will thenceforward wholly dedicate to, and spend entirely in his faithful service; and *herein*, says our Saviour, *is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit*: and lastly, That he will be also glorified in their salvation, when being pardoned and justified, and admitted into his glorious presence, they shall spend their whole eternity in singing forth his praises.

And what greater, what nobler design can we propose to ourselves, than to bring glory to God? This is the end of the whole creation; God made all things for his own glory, and every thing that he has made declares his glory and greatness. This in particular was the end for which he made man, the only creature of this lower world that is able actively to give glory to God by expressing his praise; and this, as the apostle teaches us, is the end that we ought to aim at in all our actions, 1 Cor. x. 31. *Whether therefore ye eat or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God.*

2. If our good example shall have this blessed effect upon others, if it shall provoke and stir them up to the same good works, we shall also do them the greatest kindness that it was possible for us to do them. We reckon it indeed a great kind-

ness (and so it is) to rescue and redeem a man from any bodily pain or danger; but it must needs be a much greater to preserve his soul from eternal destruction; and this is what we shall do, if by the light of our example we instruct; if by the influence of it we incite and encourage him to well-doing. And so St. James tells us, in James, v. 19. *Brethren, if any of you do err from the truth, and one convert him, let him know that he which converteth a sinner from the error of his way, shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins.* And,

3. Lastly, we shall also hereby greatly increase our own reward. For those good works which are done by another in imitation of our example, will be placed to our account as well as his, as being in great measure owing to us. And thus, by a dextrous management, we may by our good act obtain the reward of many, and receive an addition of glory, for the good works of other men done by the influence and encouragement of our example. According to that of the prophet Daniel, Dan. xii. 3. *They that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament, and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever.*

Let therefore your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.

And to God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost, three persons and one God, be given, as is most due, all honour and glory, now and for ever. Amen.

S E R M O N CV.

By Dr. IBBOT.

A good man satisfied from himself.

PROVERBS, xiv. 14.

— A good man shall be satisfied from himself.

The whole verse runs thus:

The backslider in heart shall be filled with his own ways, and a good man shall be satisfied from himself.

THESE words represent to us the different tendency which virtuous and vicious courses naturally have, the one to misery, the other to happiness.

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The backslider in heart; he that, to avoid a danger, revolts from those virtuous courses which he knows he ought to have adhered to; shall surely feel trouble enough, and bring upon himself misery and ruin by his own devices. *He shall be filled with his own ways.* But a truly good man is, even in this, by far superior to him, that though he should suffer, yet his own integrity, and the clearness and quietness of his conscience, give him abundant satisfaction. By persevering in virtuous courses, he has a spring of comfort arising from himself. *A good man shall be satisfied from himself.*

This phrase of *being filled with his own ways*, is much the same with what we meet with in chap. i. 31. of this book; where it is said of the wicked who refused to hearken to God's call, and would not be reclaimed from their sins, that *therefore shall they eat of the fruit of their own way, and be filled with their own devices.* This is parallel to the text, and means that the wicked, the backslider in heart, shall feel the effects of his own folly, and be ruined thereby. *The turning away of the simple shall slay them.* And, on the contrary, *a good man shall likewise reap the fruits of his goodness*; he too shall be filled with his own ways, and *be satisfied from himself.* And this is what I intend for the subject of my following discourse.

That virtue is its own reward, and is alone sufficient to a happy life, was an opinion in great esteem among the ancient philosophers, especially the Stoics. And though they carried this point too far, and advanced such things in favour of it, as were beyond the reach of human nature; yet it must be owned to be a glorious notion, and that nothing can be said greater in behalf of virtue.

And there is so much truth, as well as goodness in it, that the scriptures, which always make use of every motive proper to work upon reasonable creatures, do frequently insist upon it. Thus, Prov. iii. 1, 2. *My son, forget not my law; but let thine heart keep my commandments: for length of days, and long life, and peace, shall they add to thee.* And again, ver. 16, 17. where the wise man is recommending the practice of virtue, he tells us, *That length of days is in her right hand, and in her left hand, riches and honour.*

Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace.

And in the New Testament, temporal prosperity and happiness are frequently promised as a reward to virtue. *Blessed are the meek,* (says our Saviour,) *for they shall inherit the earth,* Matth. v. 5. and vi. 33. *Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you.* And St. Paul tells us, *That godliness is profitable unto all things, having the promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come;* 1 Tim. iv. 8. All which, and many more passages, amount to thus much at least, That a virtuous life is the best course we can take to secure our happiness.

But the philosophers went much farther in their commendations of virtue. They made their wise, i. e. their virtuous man, not only regardless, but even insensible of every thing that concerned the body and this life. His virtue was proof against want and pain, and all the miseries and afflictions which could befall the outward man. But this was talking beyond the reach of human nature. It was no better than prevaricating and dissembling, and giving themselves the lie. For the man that is in poverty and pain, who is afflicted in body or estate, let his virtues be never so many and great, will be affected in his mind too, and be far from being in a state of present happiness. He cannot help feeling his pain; and being sensible of his wants; and so far as he does this, so far he is miserable.

And therefore religion, which is our reasonable service, and treats us like men, does not require unreasonable things of us, nor that we should behave ourselves above the measures of a man. It does not pretend to make us insensible of evils, nor prohibit the use of all lawful means to prevent or remove them. On the contrary, religion lays the best foundation for our happiness in this world, by prescribing such rules, as, if we observe them, will enable us either to avoid these temporal evils, or will support us under them. So that supposing the sinner and the saint, the wicked and the righteous, to have the same advantages with respect to these outward things, to be in the same or the like circumstances, whether of prosperity or adversity; the one will be, not only less miserable, but much happier

happier than the other. The good man will have more pleasure in the good things of this life, and less of the evils than the wicked. Besides which, he has enjoyments peculiar to himself, which the sinner is a perfect stranger to; and which will, in a great measure, supply the want of every thing else, and fully demonstrate the truth of the text, *That a good man is satisfied from himself.*

By a good man, we are to understand one who is universally so; who keeps inflexibly to his duty at all times, and in all instances whatever: the man that is sober and temperate, meek and humble, just and merciful; and all this upon principles of religion and conscience. And therefore as he behaves himself thus towards his neighbour and himself; so he will demean himself with all piety and devotion, reverence, resignation, and submission towards God.

Now of such a man as this, it may be truly affirmed;

1. That he is most likely to escape the evils and calamities of life, and to pass through this world the freest from troubles and vexations.

2. Whatever calamities or afflictions befall him, he is better able to bear with, than other people.

3. He has pleasures and enjoyments peculiar to himself, which others are strangers to; and which will in a great measure supply the want of external blessings, and make him *satisfied from himself.*

These are the particulars which I have already hinted, and shall now more distinctly consider.

1. A good man is most likely to escape the evils and calamities of life, and to pass through this world the freest from troubles and vexations.

His virtues will be a natural defence and security to him against many evils and miseries, which would otherwise befall him. And though he must not expect to escape the common and unavoidable accidents of life, and to be above the reach of those miseries and misfortunes which are the inseparable attendants of this imperfect state of things, and the very condition of our being here: yet he will come off with less hurt and fare much better than other people.

For many, I might say, most of those things which embitter human life, and disturb men's peace and quiet, arise from their faults or follies, their unreasonable lusts and unruly passions. Intemperance and excess are destructive of the good health and constitution of our bodies; they bring diseases and sickness upon us; they cut short our days, or make life a burden to us. Malice and ill-nature, cruelty and revenge, disturb the calm and repose of our minds, and by that means impair the health of our bodies too; and besides this have an ill influence upon our outward circumstances; for they set men against us, and make them our enemies; they hinder and obstruct us in the management of our concerns, and make business difficult; and they bring down many wrongs and injuries upon us, which we might easily have escaped, if we could but have governed our passions, and been better natured. Covetousness and ambition, besides the inquietude of mind which constantly attends them, bring innumerable inconveniencies upon us, and are much more likely to ruin, than to raise us. But the good man, who harbours none of these unruly passions, nor gives way to humour and fancy, prejudice and prepossession; but in all his desires and endeavours, keeps within those bounds which nature and reason have fixed, and religion has more fully established; will escape most of these inconveniencies.

He places his happiness in the favour of God, and the sense of his own integrity; and is not so eager in any secular projects and designs, as to run himself into any danger, or to ruin his own inward peace and quiet. He is not insensible of temporal blessings, nor does he undervalue the good things of this life: but then he does not overvalue them, nor is immoderate in his pursuits of them. He desires no more than what he wants; and he wants no more than what he can use and enjoy: and this reduces his necessities to a narrow compass.

He bears an universal goodwill to all mankind, and is always ready to do all the good he can to others; and therefore is not likely to meet with so many

many injuries, and so much ill-treatment as they who are of the contrary temper and behaviour.

He is sober and temperate in all his pleasures and enjoyments; and this upon a principle of religion and virtue; and therefore he is in a much fairer way both to get and to keep those two essential ingredients of true happiness, a sound mind and a sound body, than they who set no bounds to their appetites and passions.

Thus we see, a good man does, by his virtues, remove the chief causes of trouble and disquiet, and take out of the way the great obstacles and impediments of happiness, since these arise from our inordinate affections and irregular desires, which it is the business of religion to govern and restrain. So far then as the being free from pain is one step to pleasure, and the avoiding misery is a good beginning and foundation of happiness; so far will a good man be happy and *satisfied from himself*. This is the natural effect of the virtues he is possessed of, and will, for the most part, be the consequence of them: I say, for the most part; for that it will sometimes prove otherwise, cannot be denied. But then, I observe,

2. That whatever calamities or afflictions befall a good man, he will bear with, much better than other people.

As the principles upon which he acts, keep him from running out into vain expectations, and engaging in fruitless attempts; so whenever he is disappointed in his just expectations, he can easily bear it. The disappointment will not be so great to him, who takes an estimate of things, not from fancy and opinion, but from truth and reality, and the just weight and moment of them.

If he meets with losses in his outward circumstances, and is deprived of a great part of what he possessed; he will not be uneasy, because he knows that the happiness of a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesses; and he will think the remainder sufficient for the ends of wisdom and virtue, sufficient to satisfy nature, and to supply the wants and necessities, if not the comforts and conveniencies of life.

If he be slighted and undervalued, slandered and reproached; he considers that men are apt to mistake, and that he knows himself more and better than others do: and therefore if the ill that is reported of him be true he deserves it, and will take care to amend, and to merit a better character: if what he is charged with be false and groundless, it is their fault and not his; and he cannot help it. It is what the best men have been liable to, as well as he; and many times the better they have been, the worse treatment have they met with this way. But nothing of this kind can take away the joy of a good conscience, or deprive him of the comfortable testimony of his own mind. And so long as he has this on his side, and has nothing to accuse himself of, it is a small thing with him to be judged of man's judgment.

If he labours under pain and sickness, any bodily distemper or infirmity; this, though it cannot be denied to be an evil, and inconsistent with a state of perfect happiness; yet it may be considered, 1. That this, generally speaking, is not so likely to befall good men as others, because virtue is certainly an admirable means of preserving our health, and will keep us free from many pains and diseases, which vicious and irregular courses expose men to, either by being the first cause and occasion of them, or by heightening and increasing them when they proceed from other things. And, 2. Where these things are unavoidable, and the common lot of all men; the virtuous man will be less troubled and concerned, and feel less pain from them than the wicked. For he has all along been accustomed to sobriety and temperance, abstinence and self-denial; and these virtues are good preparatives for hardships and sufferings of any kind. They gird up the loins of our mind, fortify our souls, and fit them to meet with adverse fortune. Whereas the man, who has given himself up to riotous living, *whose God is his belly*, and who has always taken his ease, and indulged in softness and sensuality, is, of all others, the most unfit for an afflicted state. Every calamity and misfortune will fall with a double weight

weight upon him; pain and want, and sickness, will make a deeper impression upon him, and pierce him to the quick.

So that the godly has much the advantage of the sinner in these respects. Though his virtues are not full proof against the strokes of fortune, and cannot ward off every blow, yet they will blunt the edge of afflictions, and greatly abate their smart.

And in general, we may lay it down as an excellent rule for the conduct of our lives, and the making ourselves as happy as we can in this imperfect state; to consider the uncertainty of all these external enjoyments, not to overvalue them, or set our hearts upon them, or place our happiness in them; but to sit as loose as we can from this world, that so we may not be overwhelmed with grief at any loss or disappointment we meet with. This is a lesson which the good man is perfect master of, and whereby he will find rest to his soul amidst all the changes and chances of this mortal life. But the wicked, who place all their happiness in this uncertain world, and value nothing but the things of this life, will never want matter of trouble and vexation.

For what makes the ambitious man, who is furnished with all that a reasonable soul can desire, discontented and uneasy; but because he is immoderately fond of honour and applause, because he overvalues himself and his own merits, and thinks that he is not sufficiently taken notice of, and distinguished? Why is the rich man, who has goods laid up for many years, many more than he can ever live to see, so solicitous to increase his store, and so fearful of every little loss, but because he is immoderately in love with this world, and the things that are in the world: I say, what is the disturber of his peace, but covetousness?

It were easy to show this, of every other irregular desire, and inordinate affection. And therefore the good man, whose religion has taught him to moderate his desires, and to subdue every inordinate passion, is above the reach of these disturbances, and can easily bear that which other people cannot endure. He is already in the heavenly state; he is raised aloft; and sees this world, and all that is in it, beneath his feet; and can

contentedly leave it to be enjoyed by those who have no relish for any thing better. To which purpose I observe,

3. That a good man has pleasures and enjoyments peculiar to himself, which other people are strangers to, and which will, in a great measure, supply the want of external blessings, and *make him satisfied from himself.*

The precepts of religion are, in themselves, holy, just, and good; they are so suitable and agreeable to the nature and reason of man, that we ought to observe and obey them upon their own account, though there was nothing to reward our obedience, or to punish our disobedience. In this sense it is an undeniable truth, that virtue is its own reward, and that happiness consists in the very doing of virtuous actions. And therefore a wise man is satisfied with the conscience of well-doing, and would not part with the pleasure arising from hence upon any account. He would not do any dishonest or wicked thing, to avoid any suffering or torment whatsoever. The reason is, because God hath planted in our nature an aversion from vice and wickedness, and a dislike to it: so that we cannot but condemn ourselves for doing any thing that is base and dishonest, unrighteous and unjust. No man that is guilty of any thing of this kind, can acquit or absolve himself: nor will any terror or torment whatever, justify, or free us from blame, if to avoid it, we do any thing of this nature.

But on the contrary, if we resolutely stick to that which is good, whatever we suffer for it; we satisfy our own conscience, and rejoice with joy unspeakable in having done so, and gain the approbation and applause both of God and man.

Every one that has right apprehensions of good and evil, cannot but receive great satisfaction in avoiding the one, and following the other. That man will be infinitely happy in himself, and appear amiable in the eyes of others, who keeps himself pure from all contagion of the things of this earth: who, when he beholds all the kingdoms of this world, and the glory of them is presented to his view, as it was to our Saviour's, yet he is not dazzled by it, nor drawn aside from the ways of righteousness, nor made to behave himself unworthily, in any instance,

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or transgress his duty towards God or man.

What a glorious spectacle is he to God, as well as to angels and men, who encounters dangers and grapples with difficulties in the discharge of his duty; who bids defiance to the solicitations and examples of the men and things of this world, and is able to get the better of them all? What joy will such a victory as this raise in heaven? And how fitly may God say of such a person, as he did of Job to Satan, *Hast thou considered my servant Job, that there is none like him in the earth; a perfect and an upright man?* Job, ii. 3. God seems to upbraid the tempter, that he could not prevail against him.

And most certainly, it is admirable to behold such an object as this. We cannot choose but think it to be the most desirable state and condition, what will make us happy in ourselves, and accepted with God. The pleasure which results from this frame and temper of mind, from having kept our innocence, and done the thing that is right, notwithstanding all the temptations to the contrary; is so far beyond any sensual satisfactions and worldly enjoyments, that when we have once tasted it, we shall be unwilling to part with it upon any account, and shall think nothing too much to be done to improve it.

Every good and virtuous action we do, affords us a double pleasure. It first strikes our minds with a direct pleasure, by its suitableness to our nature; and then our minds entertain themselves with pleasant reflections upon it. The more we abound in such actions as these, the more true pleasure we enjoy; and no greater happiness on this side heaven can be conceived, than a continued course of such actions, i. e. a life of religion and virtue. This is that state and temper of mind, that peace and joy, that tranquillity and security, wherein heaven itself consists. This is the proper happiness of man, as he is a rational creature; and is the same to the soul, as health and strength are to the body. These increase its vigour and activity; they put it into the best and easiest state, and set it at the greatest distance from all trouble and disquiet.

So that though it cannot be denied that these outward things are God's blessings, and were graciously designed to contribute to our happiness, yet still virtue is the main ingredient; inasmuch that without it the whole world cannot make us happy; and with it, a very small share of other things will suffice.

Suppose a man in never so flourishing a condition in his outward circumstances, yet, if he be destitute of virtue; if he has no government of himself and his passions; if he runs out into the excess of riot; if he allows himself in acts of cruelty, injustice, and oppression, or any other unlawful courses: he will have much inward trouble and disquiet, many a melancholy thought and reflection. His guilt will sit heavy upon him, and the Divine vengeance will hang continually over him, and through fear of death, he will be all his lifetime subject unto bondage.

But the man that is conscious to himself of his own integrity, whose heart does not reproach him; who, though he is not perfectly innocent (as *who is he that liveth and sinneth not?*) yet he is sincere; has never offended of malicious wickedness, nor been grossly negligent of his duty; but has made it his business through the whole course of his life, to keep a conscience void of offence, towards God and towards man; though this person be in a low and afflicted state, and his outward condition is mean and miserable, yet he has something within him to support him under it.

Though he is under outward miseries and afflictions, yet he has the satisfaction to feel that all is right and sound within. He has the pleasure to consider, that though he has not met with any great success in the world, yet he has kept himself unspotted from it; and could never be prevailed upon to yield to any unlawful embraces. He can recollect with great satisfaction the many conquests he has gained over riches, honours, and sensuality; and how in all his conflicts with flesh and blood, his reason has kept the field, and his faith has overcome the world. This is matter of triumph and delight, and unspeakable satisfaction.

Nor is this all the pleasure we have from a virtuous life. It fills us with
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strong and lively hopes, that, whatever our present condition is, it will some time or other go better with us. The truly good man feels himself in such an excellent frame and state of mind, that he knows certainly that this must be the state of God himself, and then he must love those that are so like him. Besides, he is conscious to himself that he has deserved no ill at any man's hands: on the contrary, it has been his study to oblige men by doing them all the good offices in his power. This raises in him a probable expectation that it may go well with him among men in this world; but the firm persuasion he has of the love of God, and the happiness of heaven, this is joy unspeakable and full of glory.

From what has been said upon this argument, it appears,

First, How unjust that reproach is, which is cast upon religion and virtue, that they deprive us of all joy and comfort of our lives, all delight and satisfaction, and fill us with melancholy and sadness of heart; and that when once we enter upon a religious course of life, we must bid adieu to all the mirth and pleasure of this world, and sigh and weep out our days.

That this is an untrue and groundless charge, they well know, who are acquainted with the ways of piety and virtue, and have experienced the pleasure and satisfaction arising from them. The practice of religion and virtue is agreeable to the nature and inclinations of good men. Every good and virtuous action is as grateful and pleasing to a good man, as meat to the hungry, and drink to the thirsty. It is as great a satisfaction to his rational inclinations, as they are to his sensual appetites. *My meat,* says our blessed Saviour, *is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work.* John, iv. 34. To the same purpose is that of holy Job: *Neither have I gone back from the commandment of his lips; I have esteemed the words of his mouth, more than my necessary food.* Job, xxii. 12.

Delight and pleasure, inward contentment and satisfaction of mind, peace and tranquillity of soul, are the inseparable attendants of religious and virtuous actions, and do naturally follow the fear of God, and the keeping his commandments. When a man has done his duty and spent his time well, he can reflect

upon his doings with comfort. He is not afraid to review his past life, and to call himself to an account for what he has done. And this is a never-failing spring of comfort. But this joy is peculiar to the righteous, and this joyful gladness is for none but such as are upright in heart. It is a pleasure which the wicked are strangers to, and which sinners can never pretend to partake of.

And for the pleasures and enjoyments of this life, God has not forbid us the use and participation of them; but has commanded it, as far as it is agreeable to reason, and to our true interest. Religion does not prohibit any thing else but our excesses in the use of these things, and prevents our follies and mistakes about them, and teaches us so to regulate ourselves in all our enjoyments here, as to heighten our pleasures, and make them more truly deserving that name. And therefore,

Secondly, Hence we see the reason why so many who profess religion, and are sincere in this profession, pass their days so uncomfortably, are perpetually uneasy and disquieted, and reap so little joy and comfort from their religion. All this arises from their mistakes about religion, and placing it either in things which do not belong to it at all, and make no part of it, or which are not the main and essential ingredients of it, the things wherein the life and power of it consist.

Sometimes religion is distinguished from virtue, and preferred before it: and then it is no wonder that men feel no pleasure in their religion, when it is destitute of virtue, which is the only thing that is valuable in religion, and that carries its own reward along with it. Much less can it be wondered, that they find no real satisfaction in their religion, who place it all in external forms and modes of worship, and take up with the instrumental parts of it, in a constant round and succession of outward observances and performances, without any regard to the true end and design of these appointments, i. e. to make the comers thereunto really better. For this is the true measure and standard of religion, the good effect it has upon us. If our religion does not make us really better, we cannot expect to be the happier for it. These two will keep an exact proportion: and though we may possibly quiet ourselves

selves a little for the present, without any real amendment or improvement; this is but a false peace, and it will be in the power of every little cross accident to break it.

Some men mistake superstition for religion; and this, instead of quieting their consciences, fills them with endless fears and scruples, and puts them upon such practices as God never required at their hands, and which are, in their own nature, more likely to provoke, than to please, his Divine Majesty.

Others place religion in melancholy and mopingness, in sequestering themselves from the world, in bodily exercise, in voluntary acts of abstinence and self-denial in the most lawful and innocent matters; in imposing hardships and severities upon themselves, in literally mortifying the body, and crucifying the flesh; like the worshippers of Baal, who cut themselves after their manner, with knives and lancets, till the *blood gushed out upon them*, 2 Kings, xviii. 28. As if God was a cruel and revengeful being, who envied the happiness of his creatures, and took delight in their misery and torment.

Whereas it is certain that he wills the happiness of mankind, and therefore enjoins them holiness, because that is the only way to happiness, as it is the only way whereby we can resemble him, who is the fountain of happiness.

And therefore, since all these severities may be undergone, without mortifying any one lust or passion, without advancing one step in real goodness; since men may deal thus severely by themselves, and yet be cruel and revengeful to others; since they may undergo all this penance, and yet be as malicious and censorious, as proud and covetous, as sensual and worldly as ever; they cannot expect that this should make any accession to their happiness, which adds nothing to their virtues, or that they should feel any of the effects of religion, when they are destitute of the thing itself.

Third, and lastly, From the whole, we may discern the true cause of that vanity and vexation of spirit, that trouble and uneasiness, that labour and sorrow which is to be found under the sun.

When we look abroad into the world, we find all places full of discontents and

complaints. They abound in the city and country; neither solitude nor society can exclude them, nor any state and condition of life can exempt us from them. They ascend the thrones of princes, and visit the palaces of the nobles, and creep into the cottages of the poor; and like death itself, are equally incident to men of every rank. But whence does this proceed? Is man born to all this trouble? Is it entailed upon him by the great Author of his being, and is there no avoiding it? How then shall we vindicate the goodness of God in making man? for if these vexations be fatal and inevitable, most true is that saying, *That it is better to die than live; and he who is not yet born, is in a better condition than either.*

But if there be any truth in the foregoing discourse, if *a good man shall be satisfied from himself*; this will justify our great Creator, by shewing us, that the true reason why there is so little satisfaction and contentment, and so much dissatisfaction and discontent to be found in the world, is because there is so little goodness, so little of true religion and virtue among us.

That there are many inevitable occasions of trouble and disquiet, cannot be denied; that poverty and want, pain and sickness, are evils, and so many hindrances and impediments to happiness, cannot be questioned by any man who is in his senses. But then, why are they so unhappy who are free from these things? what is the rust that corrupts the treasures of the rich? what is the worm that preys upon the gourd of the wealthy, and makes it wither? in a word, what is it, that makes those inwardly uneasy and discontented, who are outwardly prosperous and happy? I say, what is this, but the want of true virtue and goodness, and that inward self-satisfaction and contentment which arises from thence? The want of this comfort and support makes those afflictions and miseries which we meet with in this transitory world set so heavy upon us, and sinks us under them. The conclusion therefore of the whole matter is this: that to fear God and keep his commandments, is the best preservative against the evils of this life, and the only security from the miseries of the next.

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S E R M O N C V I.

The Effects of good and bad Principles.

MATTHEW, vi. 22, 23.

The light of the body is the eye: if therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light.

But if thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness!

IF we suppose these words to have a strict connexion with what went before, we must understand by the single eye, liberality; and by the evil eye, covetousness: for this was the subject of the two preceding verses; and in this sense, these expressions are frequently used in scripture.

But it will be difficult to give the words their full scope, under this restriction; and therefore I rather think that our Saviour, according to his usual manner, takes occasion from this particular instance, to advance a general doctrine: and from the ill influence which covetousness has upon our minds, cautions us against letting our minds be biassed by any wrong judgment, and suffering ourselves to be carried away by any corrupt passion or inordinate affection; upon account of the bad effect this will have upon our conduct, upon our whole life, and all our actions.

For what the eye is to the body, that is the mind or understanding to the life of man. When the eye is single, that is, clear and free from any distemper or vicious humour, the whole body is full of light: we can then see how to direct its several members in their motions, as if it had eyes in every part. But when the eye is evil, when that is vitiated and corrupted, dim and obscure, it either sees things in a wrong light, or not at all; and then our whole body is full of darkness, and we cannot direct our steps nor order our goings. So if our mind and understanding be free from any false bias, from any corrupt passion, or partial affection; if our judgment be right, and our opinion of things grounded upon truth; then our life has a true guide to rule it, and our conduct will be wise and right: but if our judgment be vitiated and corrupted; if our mind be stocked

with wrong notions and false principles; if our understanding be misinformed, and our conscience erroneous; if that which should be our guide, be blind itself, if that which should enlighten us, be dark itself; we have then nothing to direct us, but shall be exposed to infinite errors and dangerous mistakes; and the farther we go on, we shall be so much the more out of our way, without any prospect of coming right. How great is that darkness! what disorder and confusion shall we then be in! how wretched and miserable must be such a state!

The words thus explained, naturally lead me to consider, how much it concerns us to keep our minds free from any vicious passion, or inordinate affection; the great importance of preserving our judgment clear and uncorrupt, of having our understandings rightly informed, and being under the influence of true and stable principles; since this is our greatest security against sin and error, and will give a right turn to our life and actions.

In handling this subject, I shall,

I. Briefly, and in general, show the influence which men's principles have upon their practice.

II. I shall distinctly consider the different effects of good and bad principles.

III. From whence it will be evident, in the third place, how much it concerns us to furnish our minds with good principles, and to take care that no ill principle whatever prevails over us.

IV. And lastly, I shall close all with two or three inferences and observations from the whole.

I. Briefly, and in general, to show the influence which men's principles have upon their practice.

The judgment of the mind is the guide of life; and for the most part, men's outward actions are governed by their inward sentiments and opinions. They form to themselves some design, and lay down some principle or other; and this, whatever it be, gets the ascendant of every thing else, is most of all in their minds, and has the prevailing sway in their actions. Hence it is very common for men, when they are asked a reason why they do this or that, why they follow such or such a course? to reply, "This is my principle, this is my judg-

ment in the case." And whatever this principle or judgment be, they generally act accordingly.

Whatever we judge most valuable, and set our heart upon, it will partake most of that object. If our hearts be set upon riches, they will be found amongst the stuff, and we shall mind earthly things, and our whole man will be engaged in laying up treasures in this world. If sensual pleasure be our chief delight, we shall be immersed in the body, our God will be our belly, and we shall study nothing so much as the gratification of our bodily appetites and inclinations. If we place our happiness in being applauded and cried up by others, we shall be carried away with pride and vain-glory, calculate all our actions for public view, and do any thing that is bad to obtain the good word and the good opinion of men. But if instead of thus judging, if instead of setting the greatest value upon this world's goods, and letting our hearts be captivated with the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life; we esteem these things to be of an indifferent nature, and inferior concern; and are persuaded that there are other things within our reach of infinitely greater consequence and value: this will raise our minds to other contemplations than those men indulge, who look not beyond this spot of earth, and those perishing things which are here to be had.

This will give a new turn to our thoughts, and put us upon other pursuits. Instead of striving to please men, and gain popular applause; we shall study to recommend ourselves to our heavenly Father, and seek the honour which cometh from God only. Instead of laying up for ourselves treasures upon earth, and labouring for the meat that perishes; we shall lay up for ourselves treasures in heaven, and desire that meat which endureth to eternal life. In a word, we shall then choose what is absolutely best, and cleave to what is best, and pursue it, without ever deviating or swerving from it in any of our actions. Such is the influence which men's principles have upon their practice; they give a tincture and a savour to all their actions, and the general course and bent of their lives depends upon them.

And thus it must needs be, as long as men do not act by any natural necessity, by any blind instinct or impulse, nor are

under the power of giddy chance, or over-ruling fate and destiny, but are rational and free agents, and left to their own liberty and choice: they cannot but be determined by their judgment and opinion of things, and square their actions according to the notions and principles they have imbibed. The reason of their minds will be the rule of their practice, and their passions and affections will follow their present judgment.

Whether they reason well or ill, whether they judge right or wrong, is another question. But there can be no question made, whether their conduct and behaviour be influenced and guided by their notions and sentiments.

I proceed therefore in the

II. Place, to consider more distinctly, the different effects of good and bad principles.

I. Of the good effect and influence of good principles.

If *our eye be single*, if we are free from all false notions and corrupt opinions; if we have a true judgment of what is our chief happiness, and wherein it consists; what is the great end of life, and what are the ways which lead to that end: *our whole body will be full of light*, and, as St. Luke adds, *having no part dark, the whole shall be full of light, as when the bright shining of a candle doth give thee light.* Luke, xi. 36. Discretion will then guide us, and understanding will keep us: and our whole life and all our actions will be ordered right, and have an uniform tendency to promote our true interest. We shall then be steady and constant in the pursuit of the *one thing needful*, without ever standing still, or diverting to any other end.

This will prove our best security both against the enticements of our own lusts, and the allurements of the world. Whatever temptations we meet with (and many we must expect to meet with in every state and condition of life) will lose their force, and easily be repelled, if we have firm and stable principles of piety and virtue, *if our eye be single*, if we be at unity with ourselves; and it be our settled judgment and fixed principle, in no case, and upon no account whatever, to forsake God's righteous judgments.

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or defraud his neighbour, even his greatest enemy, though he could do it with never so much secrecy and safety. He will never violate his conscience, nor part with his integrity, though he could gain the Indies by so doing. For he does not believe right and wrong, honest and dishonest, to be defined only by law, and not by nature; if he did, wherever he could escape the law, he would think himself at liberty: but he believes himself to be under obligations antecedent to all human constitutions: and this furnishes him with other measures of moral rectitude and pravity, and more steadfast principles of action.

He that firmly believes the unspeakable joys and endless happiness of another life, will never be captivated and ensnared by sensual pleasures, and drawn into a forgetfulness of himself and the great things he is designed for; but will consider that he is a stranger and a pilgrim here; and will, for that reason, abstain from those fleshly lusts which war against the soul.

Whenever he has occasion offered him of making a figure in the world, and raising his name and reputation by unlawful means, he will remember that he is the servant of God, and will recommend himself to him, however he may be condemned or approved by men. Whatever provocations he may meet with to anger and envy, malice and revenge, or any other irregular passion, he will still be master of himself, and keep within due bounds. His principles will make him steadfast and unmoveable, or at least will hinder him from being transported into any unjustifiable excess. Of whatever kind the temptation be which assaults him, he is ready furnished with considerations which will enable him to bear up against it. Whatever solicits him, his answer is still the same: *Get thee behind me, Satan, for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but the things that be of men.* As long as he keeps his eye single, and his judgment uncorrupted; while he retains a true principle of virtue, and a right relish for spiritual things; as long as his eye is fixed upon the *one thing needful*, and it is his judgment that he ought to pursue that, whatever becomes of every thing else: he will see things in a clear and distinct light,

and will not easily be imposed upon through the deceitfulness of sin.

And if at any time he falls, through weakness or inadvertency, ignorance or surprize, he will quickly see his error, and recover himself out of the snare of the devil. The good principles which he always carries about him, and which are rooted in him, will, through the grace of God, prove a powerful means of raising him up. He will reflect with shame, that he has deserted the cause he had espoused, forsaken the rule he was to walk by, acted contrary to his own maxims. And this will make him uneasy till he has got again into the right way, till he has corrected what was amiss, and brought his practice to an agreement with his principles.

Such is the good effect and influence of a single eye, of a sound judgment, and firm principles of religion and virtue. This is the best preservative against sin and error, and the most effectual means of our recovery.

Which will more fully appear, if we consider,

2. The ill influence and effect which bad principles have upon us.

It is necessary for us to have some principles or other, if we would have our life answer any purpose. Without this, we are like the double-minded man, whom St. James describes, who is *unstable in all his ways*, Jam. i. 8. who has no particular interest to serve, but is divided between several; between the interest of this world, and of the other. Such a man is always weak and wavering, unstable and inconstant in all his actions. He has several ends to serve, which many times cross one another; and so he pursues none of them vigorously; but while he is moving towards one, inclines to another; and like a needle between two loadstones, is ever in a trembling posture, and doubtful state of mind.

This is the condition of a man that has no principles at all.

Next to this, it is as bad to have no good principles, no true principles of religion and virtue; for without these we shall be exposed to every temptation, and liable to change with every wind. Having no fixed principle within us, we shall adhere to nothing upon any firm grounds; but shall be ever varying, as the complexion

plexion of our body, or the temper of our mind, or the circumstances of external affairs happen to alter. We shall be superstitious at one time, careless or prophane at another; now a sceptic, and then a dogmatist; of one religion to-day, and of another to-morrow, and the next day of neither; and at last, perhaps, of no religion at all.

As long as the world goes well with such a man as this, and he finds his interest in his duty, he will be loyal to his prince, true to his country, and faithful to his friend: but whenever times alter, and these virtues are out of fashion, and become the object of scorn and reproach, and cannot be practised without apparent hazard to his own private interest; he will basely desert them, and will be sure to save himself, whatever becomes of every body else. And this will put him upon any acts of treachery and injustice, of force or fraud, which are necessary to compass his self-ends.

Thus insecure will that man be of himself, who wants the single eye, who is destitute of good principles; and such wild and contrary sallies will he be subject to. He is governed only by present interest or humour; and upon the least variation of these, he will quickly be supplanted, reel and stagger like a drunken man, and be at his wit's end. And whenever he falls, he has nothing to help him up; for he has no principles of religion and virtue; which, as I before observed, next to the grace of God, are the best, if not the only means of reclaiming us from the error of our ways.

But now suppose, that instead of the bare want of good principles, a man hath imbibed such as are really bad; that he has an *evil eye*, a corrupt judgment, an erroneous conscience: what dangers and mischiefs will not such a man be exposed to, and what wickedness will he not commit? He is ready prepared for any evil work he shall be put upon, by the enticement of sinners, the suggestions of the devil, or his own wicked heart. *He walks in the dark, and knows not whither he goeth, because the darkness hath blinded his eyes*; 1 John, ii. 11. He falls into mistake upon mistake, runs from one mischief into another, and adds sin unto sin.

His *whole body is full of darkness*, and he neither knows nor observes any difference in his actions. The iniquity he commits, he does not see to be such; but perhaps thinks it to be good, and believes himself obliged to commit it, and therefore commits it with greediness. For there is no wickedness so obstinately persisted in, and so furiously pursued, as that which proceeds from principle, upon a false persuasion of mind. And therefore, if we find it so difficult, even by the help of good principles, to preserve our integrity, and resist the temptations we meet with; if the weakness and depravity of our natures be such, that even with this assistance we cannot always stand upright; what will become of us, if we want it? But if we not only want good principles, but our minds are stocked with ill ones, we shall then fall with double force, and our recovery will be exceeding difficult. When temptations from without meet with ill principles from within; they will take fast hold of us, and we shall be led captive by the devil at his will. When *the light that is in us is darkness*, what a hideous darkness will then overwhelm us? And *when the blind lead the blind*, it must needs be that *both fall into the ditch*.

Hence it will evidently appear in the III. place, How much it concerns us to furnish our minds with good principles, and to take care that no ill principle whatever prevails over us.

What the eye is to the body, that, our Saviour tells us, is some leading principle in the soul, to the soul of man. And it is of as much consequence to the soul, that this leading principle be right, as it is to the body to have our eye-sight clear and good: and so much more so, as the soul is more valuable than the body. If therefore we justly reckon those miserable who are deprived of the light of the sun, who grope at noon-day as in the dark, seeking for some to lead them; and instead of that beauteous prospect which the works of nature afford others, are presented with an universal blank: how much more deplorable is the condition of those men whose minds are blinded, and their souls overspread with darkness, with ignorance and error, or thick mists of vicious lusts and passions; who discern not the beauty of holiness, nor see the wonders

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ders of God's laws; but are blind to their true interest, and sit down in darkness, and the shadow of death.

This spiritual blindness can no other way be prevented, but by keeping our eye single, and our judgment right, and our reason uncorrupted by any false principle, vicious passion, or inordinate affection. For whenever any thing of this kind becomes the leading principle in us, whether it be sensuality, avarice, or ambition, it will turn us out of the right way, and lead us through dark and slippery places, where we shall find it difficult to keep our feet, and uphold our goings. If our reason be not the guide and superintendant of our inferior powers, but is under subjection to them; if it be obscured or extinguished, biassed or perverted by any wrong motive; every thing will be out of course, and nothing but confusion and disorder will ensue. If we judge amiss, and are under the influence of any great error or delusion; vigour and activity, instead of helping us forward on our journey, will lead us the more out of our way: diligence and industry will prove mischievous and fatal; instead of promoting our interest, will procure our ruin and hasten our destruction. Every step we take, upon a mistaken principle, upon a false notion of what is our true happiness and the way that leads to it, upon a wrong sense of what is our duty and our interest; I say, every step which we thus take, is dangerous, and may end in our ruin. But, at least, it is so much time and labour lost; it is not only going out of the way that leads to our main end, but it is going directly from it; it is going so far, to return as far back again; it is doing what we must undo, and cutting out work for a bitter repentance.

Whereas, if we proceed upon right principles, and act upon true notions of good and evil, of what makes for or against our chief happiness: every step we take does really advance us in the right way; and whatever we do in pursuance of these, will turn to a good account, and help forward our main end. There will then be light, and order, and beauty, in our several actions, and they will all conspire to promote our true interest. We shall have a clear prospect of our great end, without any thing to intercept our view, or divert our course: and we shall steer through all the waves of this

troublesome world, through all the mazes and windings, all the perils and dangers of such a difficult passage; to that haven of happiness, that eternal rest, which remains for the people of God.

Of such importance is it to have our minds furnished with good principles, and to prevent ill ones from prevailing over us; since upon this depends the wise conduct of our lives, the right ordering of our actions, the obtaining eternal happiness, and avoiding endless misery. I come now in the

IV. and last place, to apply what has been said, in several inferences and observations.

1. Hence appears the great usefulness and necessity of knowledge and understanding, especially in religion and matters of a moral nature. It is St. Peter's advice, that we should *add to our faith virtue, and to virtue knowledge*; 2 Pet. i. 5. And St. Paul's prayer for the Philippians is, that *their love may abound more and more in knowledge, and in all judgment*. And he disparages one of the most excellent and illustrious things in all religion, because it was not under the influence and direction of knowledge. *They have a zeal for God, says he, but not according to knowledge*; Rom. x. 2. And to name no more, our blessed Saviour blames the Samaritans, because *they worshipped they knew not what*; John, iv. 22. and prefers the Jews before them, because they knew *what they worshipped*.

Of such account is knowledge and understanding in religion. And this not only because those actions which are done without the use of our understanding, are not the actions of a man, but of something that is short of man, and have no more virtue in them than the actions of a mere natural agent; but chiefly because our knowledge and understanding will have the main direction of our lives and actions. Such as our principles are, such in the main will our practice be. If we have right notions of God and religion, just apprehensions of the beauty and excellence of virtue, and of the baseness and deformity of sin; this will not only put us into the right way, but keep us in it. But if we entertain any false opinions of God and religion, they will produce many errors and mistakes in our practice; and we shall turn from the practice of true piety

and virtue, into a blind superstition, or an ignorant zeal, which will betray us into an unwarrantable course of proceedings. If we think of any thing worse than of sin, and are less afraid of it than we are of poverty or pain, shame and disgrace; we shall soon be drawn into it. And if we prefer any thing before virtue, whether it be riches, or honours, or sensual gratifications; we shall not long retain our innocence, but shall be ready to give it up to any temptation we meet with.

2. From what has been said, it appears how cautious we should be in the choice of our principles: as much as we should be in the choice of a guide to conduct us through an unknown and difficult way.

Our principles will have the rule and government of our lives; and therefore we should never take them upon trust, without examining into them, and seeing whether they be sound and good. For if we set out wrong, and build upon a false bottom, our work will never abide the trial: and though we ourselves should be saved, yet it will be, as the Apostle expresses it, 1 Cor. iii. 15. so as by fire, *i. e.* it will be difficult, and we shall narrowly escape the danger.

For though a good intention will justify an indifferent action, a thing in itself lawful; yet in matters directly sinful and unlawful, this maxim has no place. It is our duty, and should always be our first care, to inform our consciences, and get a right judgment in all things; and then to act agreeably to this knowledge, and according to the best of our judgment. But if we neglect the first of these, we shall certainly fail in the second, and that failure will be placed to our account.

The wise man stiles our reason, *the candle of the Lord*, which he has lighted up in every man's breast to direct his goings; and it is incumbent upon us to keep in this light, to cherish and improve it, that we may see our way to happiness, and discern those things which make for our peace. But if we wilfully obscure or extinguish this light, by any lust or vice; by any unreasonable prejudice, partiality, or passion; darkness will then overtake us indeed; but we ourselves shall be severely responsible for every

wrong step we take, every error or mistake we are guilty of.

To this natural light, God has been pleased to add a new and additional light of revelation. His word as well as our own reason, is *a light to our feet, and a lantern to our paths*. But if we come to the reading of God's word, with any vicious prejudice or sinful partiality; not to discover the divine will, but to gratify our own: not to find out the meaning of the Holy Ghost, but our own private sentiments and opinions; even this light may be turned into darkness, and we may lose our way, and follow those paths which lead down to death, while we have in our hands the words of eternal life. And if this be the case; if by any false principles we have taken up, any wrong judgment we have made, any corrupt passion or affection we have suffered to prevail over us, we pervert our own reason, and wrest the Scriptures; we have then nothing to guide us, but shall be abandoned to the power of our lusts, and the wiles of the devil. If both the light of nature and revelation be turned into darkness, how great is that darkness!

3. Hence it appears that the great evil and mischief, both the sin and the guilt of imposing upon men's understandings, misinforming their judgments, and instilling false notions and principles into their minds: since this is to betray them to a guide that will assuredly mislead them, and instead of conducting them to heaven, will bring them into the pit of destruction.

Many such principles as these are professed and taught by the church of Rome; such as not only make void the commandments of God, and render a virtuous life needless; but such as directly encourage the vilest and most barbarous practices.

With them, confession to a priest; and absolution, to which they are entitled by the mere fear of hell, which they call attrition; are sufficient to salvation.

They have instituted various penances and expiations, whereby men are taught, that they may escape the punishment, though they retain the sin; and even these too can be dispensed with at pleasure.

But they have the less reason to invent easier methods of procuring pardon for sin, than repentance and amendment; because

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because they have ways to prevent most sins from being sins, and even to sanctify vice, and turn it into virtue. If, for instance, the case be that of murder, it is but first pronouncing the man to be a schismatic or heretic, and all are such who dissent from them; and then he may be excommunicated and killed, not only without offending God, but even with acceptable service to him.

They teach it to be lawful for a man to act according to a probable opinion: and that with them is probable, which is maintained by any one or more of their celebrated casuists: so that at this rate there is hardly any villany but may be practised, since there is scarce any thing so vile, but what has, amongst them, some to patronize and defend it.

They maintain that a good intention is sufficient to justify any action, and that it is lawful to do that which is materially evil, provided we direct the inward intention of our minds to a good and honest end. And what wickedness is there, that such a principle will not justify?

In general, for it would be endless to descend to all particulars; they press men upon an implicit faith of whatever their church teaches, and a blind obedience to whatever their spiritual rulers shall think fit to enjoin. They oblige men to renounce their senses and their reason too, that they may tamely lead them whithersoever they please, and put them upon practices, though never so foul and inhuman, which they shall judge necessary for the good of the catholic cause, i. e. the promoting their own worldly interest and grandeur. And this method of practice seldom fails of the desired effect. When men wilfully stifle and suppress their own reason and judgment, and resign themselves up to the arbitrary dictates of others, there is nothing which they may not be brought to commit and approve. When the light that is in them is turned into darkness, how great is that darkness! and how dismal will be the effects and consequences of it!

4. and lastly; what has been said, should excite us to endeavour after this single eye, not only as it means in general a sound and impartial judgment, but in that literal sense which has already been hinted, as it imports single mindedness, the having but one grand purpose and de-

sign, one ruling principle and affection, and that is, serving God; and saving our own souls.

We should, as far as is possible, reduce every thing to this single point, not to have two masters to serve, and several chief ends to carry on at the same time; not to have our treasure in two different places, and our happiness placed in contrary things. But to fix ourselves immoveably upon the attainment of eternal life and happiness, and to make every thing we do subservient to this end; at least not to suffer any thing to come into competition with it.

This is what our Saviour means, when he tells us, that *no man having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God*, Luke, ix. 62. This is that *one thing needful*, which he commends Mary for choosing, while he blames Martha for being *careful and troubled about many things*, Luke, x. 41, 42. This also is the design of those parables, where he compares the kingdom of heaven to a treasure hid in a field, to purchase which a man sells all that he has; and to a pearl of great price, for which the merchant will part with his whole substance. All which intimate and recommend to us the single eye, that one purpose, upon which we ought to fix our minds, and in which all other aims and views should center. While we keep to this, our whole body will be full of light, our actions will be all of a piece, and have an uniform tendency to bring us to those regions of light and bliss, which are inhabited by wise and holy souls. But if we suffer ourselves to be diverted by any thing from this one end, and, while we pretend to pursue it, have our eye fixed upon other designs; our actions will then cross and contradict one another, and we shall be in the utmost darkness and confusion, and shall at last inherit the folly of our choice, and have our portion in that kingdom of darkness, where there is nothing but weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth; the sting of guilt, and the remorse of conscience, the most vexatious shame and reproach, the most bitter anguish and vexation, the worm that never dies, and the fire that cannot be quenched.

SERMON CVII.

By ADAM BATTY, A. M.
Rector of St. John's, Clerkenwell.

The Use and Abuse of the Passions.

ACTS, xiv. Part of Ver. 13.

—We also are men of like passions with you—

THESE words were spoken by St. Paul and St. Barnabas to correct an instance of idolatrous frenzy, and to restrain the people of Lystra from offering to them divine adoration; in order to convince the people that they who were esteemed Gods, were but men: the apostles declare themselves to be of like passions with those who did so highly esteem them; of what passions they were, the context will best inform us: the miraculous cure of a man lame from his mother's womb, raised them into a blasphemous admiration of the workers of that miracle; they cried, *the gods are come down to us in the likeness of men!* and they called Barnabas, Jupiter, and Paul, Mercurius, because he was the chief speaker. Then *the priests of Jupiter, which was before the city, brought oxen and garlands unto the gates, and would have done sacrifice with the people:* but we read in a following verse, that these extravagant passions, (like heavy bodies when once put in motion according to any direction, always running into extremes,) upon some suggestions of the Jews, that came thither, took a quite different, but equally violent turn; they changed their adoration into insults and barbarity; their intentions of sacrifice into endeavours of murder; *they stoned Paul, and drew him out of the city, supposing he had been dead.* But how did the apostles behave under these circumstances? the divine honours, with which they were addressed, raised in them the warmest resentments of impatient zeal, in order to restrain the people from doing sacrifice unto them: how they received their injurious treatment, we may collect from their usual behaviour; viz. with patience, with joy for being thought worthy to suffer for the name of Jesus; and is this an argument of their being subject to like passions with other men? to strive against those honours, when voluntarily conferred upon them, which the lords of the heathen world did at the expence of force

and bribery, by the means of their own pomp and the flatteries of their servile devotees, in vain aspire after; to choose and court the rude and cruel outrages of an incensed rabble, rather than to accept of deification, are instances of behaviour which seems to contradict their assertion, and show them to be of different passions from all the world besides: different indeed they were, not in the nature of their passions, but in the manner of exercising them; they were liable to the same emotions, but with-held by the restraints of virtue and religion from incurring every wild disorder. Thus then it is that the different regulation of our passions makes us appear a quite different species, and distinguishes between the behaviour of a pious apostle and a profane heathen.

The doctrine of the passions made up great part of the heathen philosophy: They were so sensible of the ill effects of every excessive emotion, that they thought extirpation the safest way, and to prevent the abuse of passions, strenuously argued against the use of them. But religion takes a far better method; by directing them to their proper ends, and adjusting their due bounds of reason and virtue, it makes them highly serviceable in advancing those blessed ends of God's glory and man's happiness. This subject therefore being so necessary a point of practical divinity, may be usefully treated of under the following heads; by considering,

- I. The nature of human passions.
- II. The use and abuse of them.
- III. Their proper regulation.

I. Then let us consider the nature of human passions. What our passions are, we can feel much better than receive from description; joy and sorrow, hope and fear, &c. we all are well enough acquainted with the effects of: a philosophical account of their origin, would be too nice and deep for our present purpose; we must therefore content ourselves with saying only so much of their nature, as may enable us to argue upon them with some tolerable certainty.

God, who is a being absolutely perfect, acts purely by right reason, without any commotion either of love or hatred, hope or fear, joy or sorrow: so that whenever he is mentioned in holy writ under any of those characters, it is only in condescension to our infirmities, just as we find him likewise described there with hands and eyes,

eyes, and other corporeal parts. Beasts, who have no reason, are actuated entirely by appetites; but man, who, as far as he is endued with reason, partakes of the divine nature, as far as flesh goes to his composition, partakes of the nature of beasts, is under the joint influence of reason and passions; destroy either the one or the other of these principles, and man passes into another species, either above or below that rank of being, wherein he is at present placed. Passions therefore are the natural consequences of our composition; if they be infirmities, they are absolutely necessary infirmities; and we may as well presume by the strength of pure reason to see and hear without the interposition of our bodily organs, as without the assistance of our passions to act in things about which our passions are properly conversant. Now a passion in general is a violent sensation, principally affecting the soul, but attended likewise with an extraordinary motion of the bodily spirits, occasioned by the apprehension of some, either good or evil. Thus, we see, that both soul and body are here affected: and our own experience convinces us that they are so; they are so closely linked together, that they mutually partake of each other's sensations: pain of body necessarily derives uneasiness upon the soul; a sound and vigorous state of body is attended with a cheerful satisfaction of mind: On the other hand, the grateful affections of inward love, and joy, and hope, do not rest in the soul only, but communicate to the outward man, the agreeable influences of gaiety and delight: the spirits flow with a pleasing briskness, the looks bear testimony to the inward joy; the whole body is sensibly affected with complacency and rapture: the contrary passions of hatred, sorrow, and fear, are in their nature dark and gloomy; and affect the outward, as they do the inward, man with hebetude and disquiet; and when the mind is racked with anger, the body partakes of its convulsions; and the distortions of the countenance and violent tremblings of every part without are plain indications of the furious workings of that passion within: but these sensations, though operating upon the body, do principally affect the soul; and are thereby distinguished from the outward sensations of hunger and thirst, smell

and taste, &c. which are, strictly speaking, bodily affections: The describing these sensations, as occasioned by the apprehension of some either good or evil, opens to us a division of passions with respect to the difference of those objects, about which they are exercised. What is good, does in general engage our love; when any good is removed at some distance from us, it provokes our desire of attaining it, if we believe we possibly may compass those our desires; it then exercises us with the passion of hope, if we do really compass them; joy is the result of such our attainment; on the contrary, evil in general provokes our hatred: if that evil be near us, we are naturally put upon an avoidance of it; if we believe it will overtake us, fear anticipates its coming: if it does actually fall upon us, sorrow will attend our sufferings; if that evil be the effect of injury, we are then angry with the authors of it. These seem to be the principal passions; others are indeed ranked among them, which seem only to be the excess of some one, or a composition of two or more of these: Despair, *ex. gr.* is no other than excess of fear, or fear without any intermixture of hope: presumption is excess of hope, or hope unallayed by fear: envy is a mixture of hatred and anger: pity is made up of love and sorrow; and so of other such like passions: good and evil therefore being the objects of all our passions, we may obviously enough make a division of them with respect to these objects, and look upon them to be only love and hatred, differently diversified by some accidental circumstances. Thus far have we considered passions in an abstracted view, as necessary appendices of our being, utterly indifferent with respect either to virtue or vice; but as the Almighty Creator never implanted any thing in our natures, but with design to serve wise and good ends; and as man was never blessed with any gifts, which he has not grossly perverted to base and unworthy purposes;

So it will be a natural enquiry in the 2d place to examine into the use and abuse of human passions: the use of them, as intended by God; the abuse of them, as misemployed by men. Now the use of passions is to be assistant to our reason in the attainment of whatsoever is good, in the avoidance of whatsoever is evil: to

pursue our happiness is the primary law of nature; the methods of our pursuing it, reason must dictate; the motives for so doing, our passions must supply; reason, however wise in its discernments, is perfectly languid in its executions: the highest effects of it in human nature are too cold for action, and require some invigorating principle to inspire our thoughts with eagerness, and put life and spirit into the prosecution of our designs. Propose an arduous and difficult task to any man upon the foot of bare reason and justice; and if he gives it the favorable notice of a reflection, it will be with indifference: if he acts at all in it, it will be with languor and remissness. But influence his passions, and you engage the whole man in your service: ardency of desire will push him forward; heat of expectation will support and strengthen him; the bravery of zeal will render him vigorous and persevering. Thus wisely does Almighty God engage us in the performance of our duty, not only by instructing our reason and informing our understanding, but likewise by irritating our passions; and all along recommends his precepts to us under such motives as do most intensely exercise our hopes and fears: the recompence of eternal glory may be barely known and believed without any effect; but let our hope be once filled with immortality, and a love of virtue and practice of true holiness will necessarily ensue. The assurance of eternal punishments may be certain, but unactive as long as they rest in simple intuition; but let our fear represent them to our thoughts, and their terrors will certainly force our obedience. To love God, is the strongest inducement for our endeavouring to enjoy him; to hate sin, is a certain step to our avoiding it; to rejoice in the pleasures of a good conscience, is a wonderful encouragement to our continuance in well-doing; to grieve for having done amiss, is a necessary means of recovering God's pardon and grace by hearty repentance: thus it is that our passions are highly serviceable to the cause of religion; and greatly conducive to our true interest: those which have good in general for their object, have a more immediate connection with these ends; those, which have evil for their object, are as it were guards to our virtue, and remove every

thing which may obstruct or interrupt our happiness. Our understanding, as it is the superior principle in point of dignity, ought to be so too in point of government: our passions answer their true use only by acting under-parts, and in being subservient to the rational faculties; but when contrary to the design and order of nature, our reason is dethroned, and acts in subordination to our sensitive faculties; this infers all the confusion of jarring affections, all the tumults of struggling appetites; and from thence arises that abuse of our passions, which is fruitful of every disorder and wickedness: the abuse of our passions consists in the excess of them; and as in other, so likewise in moral rebellions, when the sovereign is once subdued, the government is claimed by infinite usurpers: every passion strives for mastery; and unless some restraints were preserved, their transports would be the excess of madness: without the influence of reason, love would become insatiable fondness; hatred, implacable malice; anger would boil up into frantic rage; fear would fall into the folly of despair; joy would bubble up into wanton impertinence; sorrow would sink into the anguish of utter depression: these would be the grand controulers of the world; these would inspire every thought, and provoke to every action. We should then become a prey to each other's insolence, and fall a sacrifice to our own corruptions; peace and safety would be far from our dwellings, and the whole earth would be filled with cruelty and intemperance: our souls would become a sport to every one of these passions by turns, tossed to and fro by every blast of error, every wave of uncertainty; unable to withstand the violence of any, but obliged frequently to endure the tumultuous conflicts of them all: these are the wild disorders, which the abuse of our passions expose us to; and if they be capable of working such mischiefs as these, we shall do well, in the third and last place, to consider their proper regulation. The creating man with stubborn and irregular appetites, has been sometimes made an objection to the wisdom and goodness of our great Creator; but not to insist upon their stubbornness and irregularities being the effects of man's fall; the same answer may suffice here, which

which is made use of against some Atheistical cavils, with respect to the material creation; the rough and uncultivated parts of the earth; its craggy rocks and mountains have at first view appeared too coarse for divine workmanship; but reflection informs us that providence has hereby consulted the useful exercise of human ingenuity and industry: and are not our passions the uncultivated part of our souls? It is therefore the proper business of, it is a glorious employment for our reason, to regulate and discipline them aright. Passions are the seeds of goodness, as well as of vice; they are not therefore to be extirpated, but improved; religion must give them their right turn, and God's grace ripen them into true virtues. Now the regulating our passions, is the reducing them to the government of true reason; the directing them to their proper objects, and keeping them within the bounds of decency and virtue: In order to do this we must rightly inform the soul of the true value of those objects, we are conversant with; so that we may exercise our affections in just proportions to the nature and worth of every object, in being neither too lavish of them, with respect to inferior, nor too remiss in exerting them upon more substantial goods and evils: he that loves more than an object deserves, renders that object less satisfactory, and lays open a way to abundance of disappointment; he that hates above measure, gives himself unnecessary disquiet: he that loves less than the object deserves, loses great part of his happiness: he whose hatred falls short of its due proportions, exposes himself to danger and misery: reason therefore must be continually upon the watch, and represent things to our fancy in their proper light; must curb every warm tendency of our inclination towards meaner enjoyments; and push them forward to the prosecution of larger and more solid blessings: mistaken notions of the happiness and misery of this world and the next are the foundation of most of the irregularities of our affections; we pursue and avoid the things of this life with the same ardency as eternal enjoyments and sufferings might well deserve, and are therefore disappointed in all its blessings, and made miserable by every calamity: the happiness of hea-

ven we look upon with indifferency, and by that means become incapable of enjoying it; the torments of hell we disregard as lifeless and unintended mischiefs, and therefore certainly incur them. On the contrary, when we have taken a due estimate of, and proportioned our passions to every object, we enjoy this life as far as it will bear, without any disappointments; and constancy of mind will set us above every cross accident and uneasy circumstance: the joys of eternity will fill our largest desires; the more ardently we love and hope for them, the more intensely we shall enjoy them: the miseries of eternity are of the last importance to us; the more our aversion and fear of them are raised, the more effectually shall we avoid them.

Again, as we observed before, that there is a wonderful union between the soul and the body; and as our passions depend extremely upon our body, so we shall do well to study our natural constitution, and consider to what affections of mind the frame and structure of the outward man does more particularly incline the inward man: thus, we find, that men are said to be sanguine and phlegmatick, men of choler, or men of spleen, by discovering a predominancy of those passions which those particular cases more strongly dispose to: this consideration may serve to bring the body as well as the mind into subjection, and by guarding against its dangerous influences, will make the government of our passions a much easier task. The advantage of thus knowing our constitution is this; as our passions are the principles of our virtues and vices; so we may hereby discover what complexional virtues nature hath more particularly sown the seed of within us; and with what temptations we are most strongly beset, and either cherish or provide against them accordingly. The passions of love, hope, and joy, seem the effects of a warmer constitution, and when suffered to run wild and extravagant, are apt to degenerate in bodily lust and intemperance: those of hatred, fear, sorrow, &c. seem to arise from a colder frame, and the vicious turn they take is that of enmity, malice, envy: the first of these sorts render us in our inclinations brutal, the other diabolical; but when cultivated by reason, and improved by true religion, the former of these will ripen into the christian

christian virtues of meekness, peace, charity, &c. the other into a severe aversion of every sin, a strenuous opposition to every temptation: upon this account the vices consequent upon the former sort of these passions are generally called good-natured vices, and under that character meet with wonderful indulgence; but good-nature sure cannot sanctify any sin; and heaven, a place of entire purity, will afford no residence either for brutes or devils; but whenever any passion is greatly predominant, it is apt to make slaves of all the rest; and if reason can govern the rest, the dominion is regularly transferred to that which is able to govern our reason: the cases of Joseph and his mistress; of St. John Baptist and Herodias, evidence the subjugation of one sort of passions to the other; and lust, however good-natured in its origin, is in its effects implacable malice and barbarity. A man enslaved to both sort of passions, contracts a much larger share of guilt, is doubly sinful, not only by committing the irregularities of different affections, but by sinning against the force of nature and constitution. All disorders one way common care and prudence might certainly have prevented: to regulate our passions the other way, is a task more difficult, but a task highly deserving the sincere and vigorous endeavours of a rational creature: we are sufficiently attacked by enemies from without; and the unavoidable difficulties of our salvation furnish out matter for continual struggle; let us not suffer our artillery within to prove mutinous and disorderly; and through our own vicious indulgences court fresh dangers and hardships: our passions naturally tend to wildness and disorder; and the utmost diligence is necessary to keep them within due bounds: this is proper matter of christian discipline, and requires a mortified temper of mind to bring it to perfection; but it is a work so necessary in itself, so beneficial in its consequences, that we ought to make it the labour of our lives to render our wills pliant and our affections regular.

The main difference between a man regularly virtuous, composedly pious, serenely happy, and the tumultuously impious, profane, extravagant, is this; the one by religion hath subdued his passions, the other by sin inflamed them: the one submits to the discipline of rightly in-

formed reason and gospel-grace; the other is hurried to and fro with the blind fury of rebellious appetites. Now the method religion proposes, and the method we must take of regulating our passions, if we would be virtuous and happy, is not to extinguish them, but to exercise them in due proportions on proper objects; let christianity point out their directions, and we may then indulge them to the utmost. God, who is the source and perfection of whatever is amiable and excellent, challenges the warmest overflowings of our desires; excess of love with respect to him is impossible: sin is the greatest of evils, and deserves our fullest detestation: the glories and miseries of eternity call for our strongest hopes and fears: the joy of a good conscience is an inexhaustible fund of comfort. Anger against the vicious darling of our bosom is a just and rational rage; and the heartiest sorrow of true contrition is the happiest beginning of regenerate holiness; but after all, the influences of God's holy spirit must alone enable us to raise and regulate our passions according to these directions; and to him we must look up for his gracious assistances in this part of our spiritual warfare; that he who called this glorious and regular fabrick of the world out of a dark chaos, would likewise order the confusions and irregularities of our souls: that he who ruleth the raging of the sea, would likewise calm our tumultuous affections: and while we are by nature of the same passions with the most wicked of men; that he would make us partakers of like virtues and graces with the most exalted of his saints.

S E R M O N CVIII.

The Importance of Religion above Worldly Business.

LUKE, x. 41, 42.

Jesus answered and said unto her, Martha, thou art troubled about many things.

But one thing is needful: and Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken from her.

THE character given of our blessed Saviour is this, that *He went about doing good*; and this character he came up to in every part and circumstance of his behaviour. His works were all of them works of mercy; his words were all of them

them words of instruction: it was the employment of his life to teach mankind heavenly wisdom; and this He did, not only by preaching publicly among the people, his whole conversation was instructive, and even while He treated about the affairs of this world, He mixed with his ordinary discourse the words of eternal life.

Thus, for instance, when He talked with the Samaritan woman at Jacob's well, the common water of that well it was which opened the conference between them; but the blessed Jesus soon improved it into the spiritual and divine doctrine of those living waters of salvation, which *whosoever drinketh shall never thirst; but shall have in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life.* Thus likewise in the passage now before us, our blessed Saviour draws an useful piece of instruction from an obvious and natural occurrence in common life; and from what passed at a friendly entertainment, He takes occasion to inculcate a most important point of doctrine, He takes occasion, because what is here said, however properly, does nevertheless not necessarily arise from what went immediately before it; for these words do not, as it is frequently imagined, at the first view carry with them a comparative and superior commendation of Mary for her devout attendance on our Lord's discourse, and a reprehension of Martha for being over anxious about worldly affairs; and that on the following accounts.

The characters of these two sisters are very different; in Martha we see a disposition for active, in Mary for contemplative life; and, without doubt, each of them was a pattern of excellency in their several ways: however therefore the turns of their tempers may be compared together with respect to the nature and proper exercise of those tempers, yet the persons themselves with respect to commendation, provided they come up to respective characters, do not so properly fall under comparison.

Besides, Martha's main behaviour was such, that she did not in the general deserve a reprehension of that sort. We learn from St. John's gospel, that this was a family wherein our blessed Saviour was conversant; and we are told, that He loved Martha and her sister, and Lazarus; it was that Lazarus whom our

Lord raised from the dead; and in the whole of that miraculous transaction there is discovered on our Lord's side a great degree of tender concern for this family, and on their part a most pious veneration for the blessed Jesus. This transaction is too long to be entirely repeated; it is sufficient for our purpose barely to mention, that Martha, upon our Lord's coming to Bethany after her brother's death, agreeably to a more active disposition, while Mary, who was more sedentary, sat still in the house, went to meet him under these terms of passionate but resigned grief, of modest but submissive faith; *Lord, faith she, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died: but I know that even now whatsoever thou wilt ask of God, God will give it Thee.* She proceeds, on farther discourse, to express a strong and affectionate belief of the resurrection of the dead (an article in itself most abstruse, and at the same time not so fully promulged as it was afterwards); she likewise declares, that she did believe Jesus to be the Christ, the son of God, who was to come into the world. Now these circumstances, but more especially such an ample profession of faith as this in the very dawns of christianity, were the indication of a mind, not over-run with worldly notions, but of one enriched with a great degree of divine wisdom.

Farther yet, the particular circumstance now before us was not in itself culpable, it was even commendable. Our blessed Saviour came to *Bethany*, and we read that *a certain woman named Martha received Him into her house.* She was probably the elder sister, and being more active in her temper, took upon her the management of the family, and immediately applied herself to entertain so great and worthy a guest. Mary, taking the advantage of her sister's diligence, *sat at Jesus's feet, and heard his word:* but the company being large, and the provision too much for Martha's single management, for it is written, *She was cumbered about much serving, she came unto Jesus, and said, Lord, dost thou not care that my sister hath left me to serve alone? bid her therefore that she help me.* The request was not in itself improper; the business she was engaged in was at that time necessary; it was a duty not only of common life, but even of christianity, to enter-
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tain the blessed Jesus according to the best of her abilities; *Use hospitality one towards another without grudging*, saith the apostle; *Be not forgetful to entertain strangers, for some have entertained Angels unawares*. And if we are commanded to entertain strangers, how much more acquaintance? if we are to be hospitable, because *some have entertained Angels unawares*; how much more was it Martha's duty to exercise the utmost hospitality on this occasion, when she was actually entertaining the Son of God, the Lord of Life and Glory? There is all reason to think that her household affairs did not clash with her devotion; she had doubtless been a frequent and attentive hearer of the blessed Jesus; and the place which Mary took was in all probability what Martha would have chosen, had not unavoidable business at that time detained her; and had Martha been absent, it would have been Mary's duty not to have taken the station she did, but to have made all the hospitable provision she was able.

Our blessed Lord's answer therefore, if we refer it to the two sisters, was a modest excuse to Martha for the trouble she was at on his account, and a commendation of Mary for her pious attention to his discourse, excusing her at the same time for not joining in that trouble: but what is said of the one, does in no wise affect the other; they were certainly both of them pious, and were both well employed at that time. If we consider the case absolutely, Mary's employment was infinitely the best; but Martha's, however inferior in point of value, was at least, under her then circumstances, superior in point of necessity. What hath been here said upon the occasion of the words, may possibly seem too minute, especially since it is not intended to be made use of in the following discourse: But Scripture histories, though told in a plain and unaffected manner, do, upon a nearer view, abound with many beautiful and useful circumstances; no jot or tittle of those sacred writings are wrote in vain, every part carries weight with it, no part consequently is below our notice. This useful inference at least we may draw from what has been said, that worldly business is not utterly inconsistent with religious duties; and however some re-

ligionists do from this passage falsely and weakly pretend that a contemplative and monastic life is the perfection of christianity, yet from clearing up Martha's character, we find that it is very possible to be not less regardful of our eternal welfare for being prudent and sedulous in worldly management, and that true piety consists not in neglecting the affairs of this life, but in making them subservient to that *one thing needful*, that *good part which shall not be taken from us*. Thus much, if we refer the words of the text to the two sisters, whose names are here mentioned; but if we consider them in themselves, they are certainly a piece of general instruction drawn from an innocent and indifferent circumstance, importing the absolute necessity of the practice of religion, and will accordingly furnish out proper matter of discourse under the two following heads; by shewing,

I. That religion is emphatically the *one thing needful*; and,

II. That worldly engagements are no excuse for the neglect of religious duties.

I. Then, religion is emphatically the *one thing needful*; and this we may prove from two articles expressed in the words before us; it is called *the good part, it shall not be taken from us*.

Religion is called *the good part*, and it is justly called so from that portion of infinite happiness which is thereby derived unto us. The things of this life are so indifferent with respect to the turn they may take through the use or abuse of them, that we cannot call them *good*; and accordingly they are not here set in any comparison with religion, for that is not stiled the *better*, it is absolutely the *good part*.

Let us but seriously consider what is the purpose of mere worldly engagements, what the result of all human labours, exclusive of religion; what is it that men desire in this life with so much impatience, and pursue with so much eagerness? is it not either the vanity of uncertain honours, the baseness of corruptible treasures, or the emptiness of sordid gratifications? let us therefore suppose these things attainable in never so easy and large a manner, yet what is their comeliness that we should even vouchsafe to accept them? pleasant indeed they are, but are they not likewise vain? lovely they appear to carnal eyes,

eyes, but are they not really degrading? that can only be esteemed an absolute good to man, which affords him happiness in his superior faculties, and bears some proportion to the largeness of those faculties; but are the things of this life a rational entertainment? is the enjoyment of them at all commensurate to human capacities? let pomp and splendor make up the whole of a man's life, and let the earth be filled with his renown, will he not, upon cooler reflection, be apt to say, what is it? let mines of gold be dug up for his service, will he not say, it profiteth nothing? let pleasure flow in from every source of sensual delight, will he not even nauseate it? now this supposes a ready and easy acquisition of worldly advantages; but it is notorious how painfully men labour, and how slenderly they are rewarded; a moderate share of those advantages is to be attained by much fatigue and industry, and even that attainment is uncertain: it requires therefore great demission and abjectness of mind to make so mean a choice, to esteem the things of this life a necessary part of our happiness, and to pursue them upon unequal terms: whatever satisfaction we receive from them, it is only accidental; they may contribute to present ease, but they afford nothing of complete and substantial enjoyment; they are difficult to be procured, difficult to be retained, and equally afflicting in loss and disappointment; in short, they are in no wise absolutely needful, because a man may be happy without them, and may be unhappy in the very largest enjoyment of them.

But not so with respect to religion; religion can take no other turn than what is conducive to our chief happiness; it improves the man in his top capacities, and exalts him in the superior faculties of his soul; it shews him the paths of virtue, and leads him on to an immensity of bliss. As the practice of religion is absolutely necessary, so the goodness of providence hath made it universally attainable, that as the desire of happiness is universal, the means of attaining it may be so too; that every man, even those of the most different tempers and meanest capacities, may have it in their power to be religious, in order to their being all enabled to answer the end

of their being; for the end of this life is that we should prepare ourselves for heaven, and religion alone enables us to answer that end: it is therefore emphatically the *one thing needful*, because that alone is sufficient for our happiness, and without it we are infinitely miserable. Religion enriches us with the present perception of solid comfort, the splendid hopes of future glory; it is to the soul a continual feast, a feast which improves upon being tasted, and gives us satisfactions far beyond the demands of the largest and most craving capacities. Religion hath the *promise of the life that now is, of that likewise which is to come*, and it naturally tends to draw down all kinds and degrees of blessing, both upon the outward and inward man; *the voice of joy and healing are in her dwellings; length of days are in her right hand, and in her left hand riches and honour: her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace: she maketh all things work for our good;* and by her every circumstance of life is sanctified: to the poor *she is great riches*: and without her the rich *suffer want*; in her the *despised and distressed in life find their glory*; and by her *is the dignity of the mighty ones established*: thus even, with respect to this world, religion may be properly called the *good part*, because there is nothing which doth so largely and generally conduce to our present happiness. But it is much more so with respect to the next world: it is the future happiness of our souls which we are to aspire after; thither all our thoughts and actions are to be directed, all our wishes and expectations to center; there we shall meet with whatever refinements and exaltations our nature is capable of receiving, whatever delights and satisfactions it is capable of enjoying; there the blissful communication of saints and angels will be our portion, the glories of the Divine presence will furnish out to us raptures which cannot be uttered. But worldly business hath no share in procuring all this, it does in its own nature even tend to obstruct it: the things of this life may indeed by a pious management be made instruments of future glory, and may be turned into the means of our spiritual blessedness; but religion must give them that advantageous turn:

turn: religion alone can enrich us with the adoption and inheritance of God's children, because that alone, through the grace of god's gospel, is the condition of our attaining such our inheritance in heaven, that alone in its own nature is the qualification of our enjoying it there.

Again, religion is emphatically the *one thing needful*, because it is *that which shall not be taken from us*. Worldly advantages are neither in our power to attain or possess, and at the most the continuance of them is only for this short and uncertain span of life; when a man dieth he carrieth nothing away with him of this world, but the remembrance of it, and it would be well perhaps if what he possesses and enjoys here below becomes unto him, upon his departure hence as though it had never been: but religion we may make our own, and keep it so; the advantages of it are out of the reach of accidents, nothing but our own default can disappoint or lessen our attainment of them; the uncertainties of this life are a proper means of confirming to us those advantages more effectually, and death itself leads us into the largest enjoyment of them: those seeds of virtue and piety which are sown and nourished, and grow up in our hearts, do not perish with our bodies, will not be destroyed with the world itself; they branch out beyond the grave, and will yield unto us the glorious fruits of eternal happiness.

It hath pleased the Almighty to proportion the circumstances of things to the usefulness and advantage of them; we may therefore venture, without at all enquiring into the nature of it, to say to any thing that is of a short continuance, thou profitest nothing; to any thing that is uncertain, we have no need of thee. Religious advantages, inasmuch as they are certain, they are absolutely necessary, and from their eternity we may collect they are infinitely valuable; so that not only eternity, but an eternity of happiness and misery depends upon religion; for *to those who by patient continuance in well-doing seek for glory and honour, and immortality, will the righteous judge at the last day deal out eternal life; but to those who obey not the truth, but obey unrighteousness, indignation and wrath, tribulation and*

anguish shall be poured out upon every soul that doth evil, and for ever and ever.

Thus when we see that the practice of religion is emphatically the *one thing needful*; all other things are accidental, this is essential to our happiness; all other things principally affect the body, this relates absolutely and immediately to our souls, our infinitely better part; all other things are earthly in their advantages, this conducts us to heaven, and enriches us with the blessings of God's kingdom; all other things are transitory and uncertain, this sure and permanent, beyond the longest period; it is placed within the reach of every one's attainment, diligent sincere endeavours will never be disappointed in the pursuit after it; and it is of the last importance to us not to be disappointed, for the practice of religion will exalt us to everlasting glory, the neglect of it will conclude in everlasting vengeance.

Proceed we now in the second place to shew that worldly engagements are no excuse for the neglect of religious duties.

This article follows from the foregoing head of discourse by so necessary and direct a consequence, that to treat of it professedly may seem superfluous; for if religion be the *one thing needful*, nothing whatever ought to interfere with our practice, no excuse whatever can be admitted for the neglect of it. But if we look out into the world, we shall find mankind entirely cumbered about many things; according to the parable in the gospel, *one is going to his farm, another to his merchandize; they marry and are given in marriage*; they pursue their business, their pleasures, their amusements, and their vanities, with the same eagerness and diligence as their eternal welfare might well deserve; and all this while they think themselves very commendably employed. Tell them of the infinite importance of religion, and you will be answered with the unavoidable necessity of worldly engagements; if they had more leisure, they would then indeed joyfully apply themselves to service more strictly divine; but their business is so constant and pressing that they cannot attend both; what little time they have to spare must be spent in some moderate recreation, in doing the duties of their stations and callings,

lings, they are satisfying the ends of Providence; this is all they can do; they are careful not to commit any gross sin, and they hope that a life thus spent in industry and (what they call) innocence, will find favour and acceptance at the last day; and this they make good in their practice at all adventures. The incumbrances of life engage a most sedulous and ardent application, and all other affairs are superseded, when their interest or pleasure call for attendance; but every avocation is a sufficient excuse for neglecting religious performances; slight indispositions, trifling enjoyments with friends, little inclemencies of the weather, &c. will plausibly enough determine their absence from divine service, and the care of their immortal soul, whom no sickness or obligation, no storms and tempests could withhold from pursuing their temporal advantages. And is this at all answering the end of our being? is this at all coming up to the true designs of Providence? it hath pleased the Almighty to place us in a state where trouble and labour are our necessary portion, but are we therefore to make them our sole business? a moderate and prudent provision for ourselves and families is highly reasonable and necessary for the well-being of this present life; but we have prospects beyond this life; it is our grand duty to be building up for ourselves an habitation immortal, incorruptible in the highest heavens, and that is not to be done by worldly solicitude and bodily labour: the soul must be purified by divine grace, and the mind must be formed into the approbation and habit, and pleasurable performance of the good and acceptable and perfect will of God: his laws must be our study; his commands our practice; his service our delight.

This life is a state of pilgrimage, wherein we ought to be pressing homeward with all diligence and expedition; and shall the present refreshments we receive cut us off from our future prospects? can looking out for mere conveniencies and accommodations upon our journey be thought any excuse for our neglecting our home? can our concern for slender and uncertain advantages make it at all reasonable that the *one thing needful* should likewise be the one thing disregarded? what is this other than by securing to ourselves a low temporal emolument to pre-

clude ourselves from enjoying the glories of God's kingdom.

Our blessed Saviour assures us, *we cannot serve God and Mammon*; we are therefore to seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness; and to esteem all earthly blessings as accidental and subordinate instances of happiness, to be desired with moderation, to be pursued with indifference, to be enjoyed with modesty, to be parted from with resignation; to be such as may contribute to our present comfort, and administer to our future welfare, but such wherein our true happiness does not consist, such consequently upon which we are to place no dependance.

To forsake all and follow Christ was the primitive test of gospel perfection, and however we may not be called upon actually to forsake our all, yet it is our duty to be in a disposition to give up every thing that is near and dear to us in this life, if it should please the Almighty in the course of his providence to require it at our hands; such a disposition is to be wrought in us, not by a warm pursuit after worldly business, but by a refined and mortified spirit of true holiness; and such a spirit as this must result from a regular and habitual performance of religious duties, a jealous and constant attendance on divine service: though all regard for the things of this world is not to be given up, though a proper and modest care be even commanded, yet a large and intense degree of such care is sinful, and that for this plain reason, because it is a means of weaning our affections from the objects of eternity, and fixing them upon the vain and perishable things of this life; it thereby slackens our preparations for heaven, and consequently hinders our arrival thither.

We frequently find persons in the last stage of their life, declaring, that they have been honest in their dealings and industrious in their callings; they hope God will accept them upon those terms, and excuse the neglect of their duty to Him: there indeed they have been faulty; in other words, they have pursued trifles, and neglected their main business, and expect to be rewarded in consequence: honesty is but a scanty instance of obedience, worldly industry cannot save: is earthly provision a suitable preparative for heaven? is getting an estate, or raising our character, a proper

per purchase of eternal bliss? can the cares and incumbrances of this world be a means of tuning and harmonizing our souls for spiritual and divine joys? God's kingdom is to be attained by a steady course of virtue and piety; and those only who act up to God's glory will partake of his happiness.

If therefore religion be the *one thing needful*, let us make it our entire choice; if it be that *good part which shall not be taken from us*, let us make it our own, and let us keep it so; in the midst of our worldly engagements, let us be frequently calling our minds off from every thing which may tend to unsettle our affections for heaven, and prove an obstacle in our way thither; that while we are encompassed about with sensible objects, our faith may never be shaken, nor our hope weakened by the power of them: let us be frequently turning our thoughts and desires heavenward, always remembering that subordinate degrees of happiness call only for subordinate degrees of concern: whatever becomes of our bodies, the stress of our care and diligence must be laid out upon our souls, the former are not to be entirely neglected, but the latter must be provided for absolutely. This is the only composition between this world and the next, to make a spirit of devotion the leading principle of our souls, and that will sanctify whatever we possess, whatever we do to make God's glory the main end of our actions, and then our own happiness will be the reward of them: worldly engagements will then become innocent, they will become even commendable and virtuous, when *amidst all the changes and chances of this mortal life, our hearts are surely fixed there where true joys are to be found.*

S E R M O N CIX.

The Joy of a good Christian.

PHILIPPIANS, iv. 4.

Rejoice in the Lord always; and again, I say rejoice.

IT is a wonderful advantage in our most holy religion, that it sanctifies the whole man, and gives a turn of piety to the most natural and indifferent circumstances of life, if we do but keep God's glory in

view, and make that in general the end of our actions, whether we eat or drink, or whatever we do, we are constantly engaged in the divine service; and our whole life will ascend up to heaven, as a sacrifice of a sweet smelling favour.

There is not a passion of the soul, a temper of mind, or function of body, which may not be improved into a duty, and consequently which may not promote our eternal happiness: and such is the power of the gospel; that those, which to an irregenerate man, are only tempers and habits, do, by the blessed influences of the holy spirit upon him who is a new creature, become christian virtues and graces. Faith, hope, and charity, *e. g.* simply considered in themselves, are the one, an habit of the understanding, the other two, passions of the soul: but when refined and exalted under the gospel, directed to proper objects, and regulated by religious views, they pass into the three virtues which are, by way of eminence, called the theological virtues, and make up the three most necessary and divine graces of a Christian life.

Thus it is, that religion does not destroy nature, but exalts it; does not alter men's faculties, but improves them: it is even nature itself, cultivated by right reason, restored and purified by gospel-grace. Nature prompts us to pursue our happiness in general; religion binds it upon us as a duty, to pursue that particular sort of happiness, which it is man's highest interest to aspire after: nature necessarily breaks forth into joy, when its pursuits after happiness meet with success; religion commands us to make God the object, as of our happiness, so of our joy; *rejoice in the Lord*, saith the apostle: nature seems always ready to fall in with so delectable a passion, but is much at a loss for matter to exercise it upon; religion proposes God to us, as a never-failing source of substantial rejoicings: *rejoice in the Lord always*, saith the apostle, *and again, I say, rejoice.*

This precept was given to the Philippians at a time, when the church of God laboured under persecution. And if in the midst of dangers and difficulties we are commanded to possess our souls of the calm composure of secure innocence: if in the midst of worldly

calamities, it be our duty to rejoice, and religion be able to furnish out matter for our continual rejoicings; how much more does it become our duty, how much more ready ought we to be, to exercise this delightful passion, when such trials and calamities are removed far from us; when no other difficulties and afflictions fall upon us, than what are common to man?

It shall be the business of this discourse, to set forth and inculcate the precept now before us, by considering,

I. What that rejoicing in the Lord is, which we are here commanded to exercise.

II. The duty and advantages of it; and,

III. The means of rendering us capable of performing it.

I. Then let us consider, what that rejoicing in the Lord is, which we are here commanded to exercise.

It is the being of a regular evenness of temper; a cheerful frame of spirit; a settled complacency of mind; the finding comfort, and taking delight in every condition of life; the looking up to God with the gratitude of praise and thanksgiving for every dispensation of his providence; the making the satisfactions of religion our chief delight, and applying all the various occurrences of human life, to our present comfort and future welfare.

Thus then, religious joy is not a transient exertion of that passion, but an habitual cheerfulness of mind; it does not bubble up in the flashy transports of mirth, but smooths over life with a constant serenity: not that religion is without its transports, it even abounds with them; vigorous and pious contemplations on the divine perfections and the joys of eternity, will raise in us ecstasies of delight: and this difference will always be found between worldly and religious transports; the former naturally fall off into dejection and melancholy; but acts of religious transports, supply fresh springs of comfort and satisfaction to us, and make the streams of our habitual rejoicings flow on more clearly, more strongly, more copiously.

It must indeed be confessed, that this world is a place, as of imperfect happiness, so of imperfect joy; the most serene and calm condition of life, meets with the gloomy and ruffling storms of many afflic-

tions; and it is impossible, in the midst of outward uneasiness, to preserve a perfect composure within. But we shall come up to this precept of rejoicing always; when our joy is substantial, though not complete; when it is predominant, though not unallayed: when none of the storms of life are raised within our own breasts; none of them suffered to rage and grow tumultuous there: when the soul has a controuling power, in frequently preventing those disorders which might otherwise arise; there, in lessening and becalming those that do: when religion affords us certain pleasures; this world only accidental ones; to be received with thankful indifference, to be parted from with cheerful resignation: when we are easy and contented, though not equally so, under outward blessings and calamities: when the severity of our composed judgment can curb the petulancies of wanton mirth, and the lively idea of our imagination can feast even our reason with jubilee and delight: when we esteem God to be our God, our hope, our dependance, our happiness under all circumstances, and bless and adore Him under all: when, through the assistance of his grace, we are able to abound with satisfaction, to be in want with contentment; to enjoy the good things of this life with thankfulness, to suffer its evil things with patience: when this is our case, then may we be truly said to satisfy the precept now before us; this is that *rejoicing in the Lord always*, which we are here commanded to exercise.

But in treating upon this head, complexion is very much to be considered; and this duty, though necessary for all, is not equally easy to all, nor in so high a degree practicable by all: the natural tenderness of some constitutions bends under every weight of affliction; the timorousness of their temper fills their minds with fears of calamities which are not, and doubles the pressure of those which are: others, on the contrary, are blessed with abundance of innate vigour, as though nature had designed them to outmatch adversity, and to rise superior to every worldly suffering: religion is in both cases necessary, to strengthen and support the former, and at least to correct and improve the latter. A man, through hardness of nature may be brought to laugh in the midst of distresses; yet such his laughter may be madness and folly;

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his heart may not cheer him after a godly fort; he may not rejoice in the Lord. The application of religious comforts in this latter case, is indeed the easier task; but in the former, it is far from being impossible; christianity does not only improve natural strength, it supplies for it; grace will support us above, and even against nature: let the streams of worldly afflictions be opened upon us in never so large and forcible a current; the springs of religious joy will be continually bubbling up for our refreshment: piety will be to us, having nothing, as though we possessed all things; and when all other succours fail us, we may still *rejoice in the Lord, and joy in the God of our salvation.*

Proceed we now, in the second place, to consider the duty and advantages of such our rejoicing: the duty and advantages, because the duty will best appear from considering the advantages of it, and they may be comprized under the three following articles:

I. It enables us to go through our religious performances in a much more advantageous and acceptable manner.

II. It makes us much more happy and easy in this life.

III. It tunes and harmonizes our souls for heaven.

I. Then the habitual cheerfulness of religious joy enables us to go through our religious performances in a much more advantageous and acceptable manner.

It is the free-will offering of the heart which God requires at our hands; but gloominess of thought damps all the powers of the soul, renders it lifeless and unactive; and the spirit of devotion is quite lost, in the midst of anxious and desponding cares. God, who is the chief, the sum of our happiness, is to be addressed and enjoyed with vigour; but cheerfulness of mind can alone inspire that vigour: religious joy must enliven and actuate the whole man; must lift up the hands which hang down, and *strengthen the feeble knees*; must inflame the heart with sentiments of sincere gratitude, and fill the mouth with songs of devout praise. A settled complacency of mind, draws us nearer to God, by making our affections towards him more intense, our dependance upon his providence more entire, our converse with him more vigorous and delightful. Cheerfulness engages us to encounter and go through all the difficulties

of our duty; gives us the truest relish of the Almighty's mercies, the highest sense of our obligations towards him; and renders his service easy and pleasant to us, by putting it upon the ingenuous foot of gratitude and love: it represents God to us, under the brightest characters of whatever is amiable and excellent; religion under those, of solid truth and divine purity; and the joys of heaven, under the most elevated conceptions of bliss and glory: by this mean it renders our love of God entire and fervent; our practice of virtue sincere and regular; our aspirations after eternity, vigorous and persevering: in short, it makes our whole life, one continued act of praise and thanksgiving, which the Almighty is pleased to esteem the highest instance of devotion, such as He will most graciously accept. *Whoso offereth me thanks and praise, saith the Lord, he honoureth me.*

2. This evenness of temper makes us much more happy and easy in this life; more happy with respect to ourselves, more easy with respect to our neighbour.

Abundance of worldly happiness and misery depends chiefly upon imagination; the objects which create them come upon us with indifference, and afford either satisfaction or uneasiness, according to the reception they meet with. Now a cheerful frame of spirit gives an agreeable turn of pleasantness to all objects that come in its way: it is ever attended with clearness of judgment, and liveliness of fancy; so that it distinguishes between what is able to afford pleasure, what not; and chooses or rejects accordingly. It improves all our enjoyments, it allays and sweetens all our afflictions; we are thereby enriched with a settled peace within, and suffer nothing, in comparison, by calamities from without.

The man of a melancholy cast of mind, by being uneasy within himself, becomes troublesome and uneasy to others; he is jealous and suspicious; solicitous for he knows not what, displeased he knows not why: this makes his behaviour reserved, his conversation designing, ready to misinterpret every word, to resent every action. This behaviour calls for shyness and indifference from others; hence ariseth fresh matter of jealousy and resentment; affronts and injuries ensue, and melancholy turns into downright uncharitableness.

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But the cheerful man naturally overflows in streams of good-nature; he does not reserve his happiness to himself; he communicates it to others; and, like the sun, diffuses round about him a delightful scene of joy and gladness to all he converses with. Love is in all his thoughts, meekness in all his words, kindness in all his actions: This provokes others to like love, and makes good-will circulate briskly among men. The cheerfulness of our very looks hath a benign influence upon the peace and harmony of the world; and it is a duty we owe to mankind, as well as ourselves, to be as far as possible removed from inward disquietudes and outward moroseness: Thus then religion passes into common life, and in the complacency of an even temper, an excellent foundation is laid for christian charity; it not only sweetens, it even sanctifies our whole conversation; and, as we come now in the third place to consider, it tunes and harmonizes our souls for heaven.

Our souls will not be changed upon our entrance into another life, but only heightened and improved thereby; and what room can be found for sullenness and dejection amidst those blissful objects of eternity? We must rejoice in the riches of God's grace, before we can be admitted to rejoice in those of his glory: in order to make the joy of fruition our reward hereafter, the joy of hope is our duty here: This habit therefore of religious rejoicing, is a proper preparative for our future happiness, inasmuch as it gives us an antepast of heaven itself; as large and vigorous a perception of those spiritual delights as our present faculties are capable of receiving; and by constant exercise enlarges that passion of the soul, which will be blissfully employed to all eternity. From considering the duty and advantages of this habitual cheerfulness of mind, pass we now to consider, in the third and last place, the means of attaining it; and these principally are,

I. The possessing our souls with just notions of, and a sure trust in the Divine Providence.

II. The preserving a good conscience through the regular discharge of our duty; and,

III. The applying ourselves to commendable and innocent employments.

1. Then we are to possess our souls

with just notions of, and a sure trust in the Divine Providence.

The Almighty's Providence is a wonderful source of comfort to all that are truly sensible of it: We are placed under the immediate protection of a Being infinitely wise, powerful, and gracious; whatever we enjoy, whatever we suffer, comes all from the same bountiful indulgent hand, who desires and provides for our happiness, beyond the largest of our conceptions; we may therefore with implicit joy rely upon his conduct, and *cast all our care upon him, who so wonderfully careth for us*: It is the constant effect of melancholy and discontent to murmur and repine at the Almighty's dispensations; and without considering any of the divine indulgencies, to extract misery and discontent from all the dark parts of his Providence: But he who has brought himself to depend upon God's wisdom and goodness, is easy in his afflictions, and happy in those dispensations he does not understand, because he is assured they are for his advantage: God's Providence, however unsearchable, is nevertheless sure and benign in its operations, and *all things will work together for good unto him that fears the Lord*: He tastes divine mercy in all the blessings and chastisements he receives, and thereby, the former meet with a double relish, the latter become at least easy and palatable. Just notions of this article will inform us that God is not partial in his government; that he is no respecter of persons, but intends, as far as in his infinite wisdom he sees convenient for us, the present, but absolutely the future welfare of all his creatures; and a well-grounded dependance upon his Providence gives us all the bright assurances of safety and happiness. But in order that such our dependance may be well grounded, we must, in the

2d place, be careful to preserve a good conscience through the regular discharge of our duty.

Cheerfulness is the regular attendant upon innocence; virtue and joy do naturally subsist together; guilt is dark and gloomy, filling the soul with all the dreadful apprehensions of whatever is odious and miserable. God, who is the foundation of all solid comfort, is here rejected, and all pretensions to the favourable regard of his Providence, are given up;

and without God, cheerfulness would be utter folly, laughter direct madness. *The joy of a wicked man is as the crackling of thorns in the fire; however it may blaze for a time, it soon evaporates into smoke, and is at best but noisy vanity; in the midst of such laughter the heart is sorrowful, and the end of such mirth is heaviness.*

But the joy of a good conscience is a continual feast; the calm composure of secure innocence, the pleasurable sense of virtuous and religious actions, fill the heart with complacency, enlarge and replenish the soul with satisfaction. The applauses of a self-approving mind are always enlivening and refreshing; virtue knows no tumults and disorders; it gives us a grateful reflection upon whatever is past, a peaceful enjoyment of whatever is present, a delightful prospect of whatever is to come; it swallows up all our cares, and fears, and doubts in love and faith, and a glorious assurance of an happy eternity.

But in speaking to this head we must not omit the great duty, as well as expedience of an uniform and fervent habit of devotion. Fervent intercourses with the Almighty in prayer and meditation, make the brightness of the divine perfections familiar to us, give us all the blissful perceptions of pure and complete enjoyments, and shed an enlivening tincture of heavenly satisfaction over every part of our lives: Devotion enlarges the soul, and enriches it with every divine blessing; it opens upon us those rivers of pleasure which are at God's right hand, and replenishes our most outstretched desires with raptures of delight which cannot be uttered. The uniformity of such our devotion will make those pleasures perpetual to us, the fervency of such our devotion will make them transcendently delightful. A mind thus piously affected, and zealously employed, can never be at a loss for matter of joy and transport, amidst those ennobling and engaging acts of praise and adoration, whereby it is ever approaching the divine Being, and communicates with him in his happiness. These blissful outgoings of the soul towards God will make life one continued scene of pleasure, so that to attain the spirit of true devotion is the most compendious way of becoming happy; for whosoever thus converses continually with

the Lord, must necessarily fall in with the precept in the text, *of rejoicing in the Lord always.*

3dly and lastly, The applying ourselves to commendable and innocent employments, is proposed as another proper means of attaining this habitual cheerfulness of temper.

The state of the mind depends wonderfully upon that of the body; a sprightly flow of spirits will naturally break forth into a pleasing gaiety of soul, and a sluggish inactivity of blood will benumb the mind with hebetude and melancholy. Idleness and indolence overcharge the body with gross humours, and oppress the mind with loads of discontent. Industry quickens and enlivens; activity of body warms and exhilarates the soul. Accordingly the business and amusements of life serve to employ and recreate mankind, to fill up their time, at least innocently, and dispose them for the better performance of religious duties, by exercising their bodies in what is wholesome, their minds in what is agreeable. Thus it is, that our callings, however laborious, are not imposed on us as hardships, they are really blessings: and those persons whose circumstances set them above pursuing the fatigues of business, are obliged to supply that defect by the fatigues of exercise.

Again, we ought to apply ourselves to such moderate and innocent diversions, as may keep both our minds and bodies in a right frame of vigour and complacency. God did not place us here to tantalize us with the bare sight of worldly blessings; as he has given us all things richly to possess, so likewise comfortably to enjoy. The earth brings forth briars and thorns, and is therefore not a place of complete happiness; but it likewise brings forth corn, and wine, and oil, that they may strengthen and gladden man's heart, and make him a cheerful countenance; and we may apply these gifts of God to their intended purposes, with pleasure and advantage. This way of conceiving enlarges our views with respect to outward enjoyments; they hereby do not rest in the outward man, they administer to the spiritual happiness of the inner man. But after all, what is mentioned upon this head is chiefly prudential; these circumstances having only a more remote influence

fluence upon the mind, by immediately affecting the body, they have not a spiritual, they have a general connection only with the precept now before us; however, it is not amiss to suggest any thing that may be of service, even in the most remote instruments of duty, especially since we frequently find, that bodily disorders betray the minds of sincere well-designing persons into discontent and despair: They imagine themselves in a reprobate condition, and feel none of the comforts of religion, purely because their fancy is clouded with outward melancholy and gross humours. Here the malady is entirely of the body, and therefore the applications of wholesome exercise, of agreeable but innocent recreations, are the proper means of recovering the advantages of religious joy.

In short, it is our duty to apply whatever contributes to promote the evenness of our temper, the cheerfulness of our souls, and satisfaction of our minds; because, through God's blessing, it will likewise contribute to our more vigorous performance of every virtue, our attainment of every divine grace.

But while we do thus, by every pious and prudential method, endeavour to keep the spring of religious rejoicings within our own breasts, pure and open, let the overflowings of it stream forth in every method of communication among our neighbours. The pleasing influences which religion has upon us may provoke others to like piety; for devotion never stands so powerfully recommended to the imitation of mankind, as when peace, love, and joy are its direct and visible effects.

Again, it is an excellent rule in life, when we are not able to perform higher duties, to employ ourselves in those that are lesser: But the good-nature of a pious Christian may be continually exercised; where acts of more substantial charity are out of the sphere of our abilities, kind expressions, mildness of behaviour, agreeable turns of conversation, and many other engaging methods of keeping up good will, which are the natural outgoings of christian cheerfulness, contribute wonderfully to promote the present peace and happiness of mankind, do naturally tend to propagate the exercise of religious rejoicing, and make the general practice of our duty much more easy and delightful.

So far is Christianity from being of that reclusive and abstracted nature, as some religionists falsely pretend, that it is in the highest degree free in its carriage, diffusive in its behaviour; even common life shares largely of its influences, and it improves the offices of mutual intercourse into Gospel virtues and graces.

So far again is religion from being of a sullen morose nature, a severe contradiction to all joy and satisfaction whatever, that it makes joy the end of our being, and joy the means of attaining that end: And if we may rejoice in the precepts of Christianity, how much more in the rewards of it? This religious joy, which is at present our duty, as it is greater than, and distinct from, any thing that this world can give, so neither can it take it away: That fulness of joy which abides us hereafter, is glorious beyond conception; it will afford us an immensity, an eternity of happiness.

S E R M O N CX.

The Evil of Corrupt Conversation.

EPHES. iv. 29.

Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth; but that which is good for the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers.

THE apostle having declared the dignity and advantages of that strict union which is betwixt Christ and the members of his church, infers the obligation his Ephesian converts lay under, of *walking worthy of that vocation, wherewith they were called*; of walking, not as the other Gentiles walk, or as they themselves, while Gentiles, did walk: He exhorts them, that they would now put off concerning former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts; that they would be renewed in the spirit of their mind; and that they would put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness. The apostle then proceeds to warn them against some particular sins, which have no connection with one another, and therefore may be each treated of without any immediate regard to the context; such as *lying, stealing, immoderate anger, malice*, and some others. The words of the text stand among the rest of these precepts, and are intended to regulate the common conversation of men with one another.

Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth. The word *corrupt* is frequently thought in this place to signify filthy or obscene: but it may perhaps be more rightly supposed to intend, either rotten, and so to be part of the allegory; that is, carried on by the term *edifying*, which in its first sense signifies building; and *corrupt communication* may therefore design any sort of discourse which is contrary to spiritual edification, as rotten materials are very improperly employed in literal buildings; or else it may mean unfavoury, in opposition to what the apostle calls in another place *Speech seasoned with Salt*; that is, such speech as is both wholesome and grateful, whereby instruction or edification is conveyed, and conveyed in an agreeable manner.

But that which is good for the use of edifying. Edification is a spiritual term, and generally signifies improvement in christian virtue; but here it is expressed, as though it intended, principally indeed, improvement in a spiritual sense; but at the same time it may include any other sort likewise of unprofitable and useful improvement.

That it may minister grace unto the hearers. The term *grace* may be interpreted in a larger sense than it usually is, and be supposed to signify christian cheerfulness as well as christian purity; so the same apostle uses it in another place, *let your speech be with grace, seasoned with salt, that ye may know how ye ought to answer every man*; where it is plain we are commanded to accommodate ourselves to all men in our speech, and how accommodate ourselves to them otherwise than by the engaging and agreeable manner of our speech?

The precept therefore will stand thus; Let no corrupt, no rotten, no unedifying, no unfavoury communication proceed out of your mouth; but let your discourse be calculated for improvement, and calculated in such a manner, that it may minister both profit and pleasure to those you converse with.

From which words thus explained; we may take occasion to consider, how common conversation ought to be regulated, so as to take a profitable and improveable turn: a topic this, far from being below the regard of the pulpit, since conversation is what all mankind run into, as the most agreeable circumstance of life;

and as dangers always attend what is agreeable, conversation abounds with them: the prophane, the dissolute, the uncharitable, do all make their discourse favour strongly of their particular dispositions; and through that natural proneness which men bear to sin, through the influences of bad example, and the familiar and entertaining lights wherein men love to place their favourite vices, we find that sin insinuates wonderfully by common discourse, and men are much more talked into wickedness, than betrayed into it any other way; and dangers in this respect are more particularly dangerous, because mischiefs, like blessings, by being common, become disregarded: men fall into conversation, as into an obvious engaging office, and it is an affair so much of course, that they never attend either to its nature or its consequences.

Now the whole of this subject seems included in the *matter* of our conversation, and the *manner* of it; the matter of it ought to be calculated chiefly for use, the manner of it for a more engaging conveyance of that useful part. As to the manner of conversing, it is so entirely prudential, it depends so very much upon custom and fashion, upon the variety of tempers, and the difference of circumstances, that it is impossible to consider it minutely within any compass; it may only be remarked in general, that the best rule for conversing is to study the turn of our own nature; and to make that as universally agreeable as we can, to fall in with other persons tempers and inclinations, as far as we can with innocence and discretion, and to give all our discourse such a tincture of sincerity and cheerfulness as may procure for us both the good opinion and the good affections of those we converse with. It is the matter therefore of conversation, which will be at present considered; and that for method's sake, may be brought under the three following heads, that which does more immediately relate to God, our neighbour, and ourselves; more immediately, because all conversation must concern ourselves, as actors in it; yet for distinction's sake, that which more immediately relates to God may be called religious; that which more immediately relates to our neighbour, may be called charitable discourse; and all other discourse

course whatever may be said more immediately to relate to ourselves.

1st, then, of *religious discourse*: Religion certainly is the most excellent topic for conversation, but withal the least regarded, and might justly challenge to have very much said of it here, because so very little is said of it out in the world; there cannot be a greater mark of an universal decay of piety than the neglect of such discourse in common conversation: we find enough of religion in men's heads to minister strife and dispute, but not enough of it in their hearts to engage them to think of it affectionately, and to speak of it with zeal and reverence: the charge of hypocrisy and stiffness runs so high against religious talkers, that give but a man that character, and you will go near to ruin his credit in life; he will be thought unfit for society, either because he is dull, or dishonest, and must therefore be a worthless mischievous member of it. True indeed it is, that religion hath frequently been made a cloak for knavery to work under, and a wolf will be always capable of doing most mischief in sheep's cloathing; but if the abuse of any thing were an argument against the use of it, that argument would extend to every thing; every thing in this life must be laid aside, and chiefly the best things, because they are generally applied to the worst purposes. To decline therefore any part of religion for fear of being esteemed hypocrites, is actually to incur damnation for fear of its being thought that we shall incur it; and however some men may talk piously in order to act impiously to greater advantage, yet certain it is, that were men generally better talkers, they would likewise generally be better livers. It is not indeed always out of *the abundance of the heart that the mouth speaketh*, yet the abundance of the heart will utter itself; and where there is no good discourse, there is certainly no fund of goodness within.

As to the charge of stiffness and formality, it is very improperly applied to religious discourse, because they are terms which signify an unnecessary severity; and however severe religion may seem in some of its articles, it is certainly not unnecessary in any of them; on the contrary, it furnishes out the most necessary topics of discourse, because on its

articles our eternal welfare depends; it furnishes out likewise the most refined and exalted topics, because it takes in the transcendent glory and purity of the divine attributes, the wonders of the creation, the much greater wonders of our redemption, the beauty, the wisdom, the power of Providence, the lively notices of virtue and holiness, the splendid hopes of bliss and immortality: religion enriches the soul with the most bright ideas of whatever is excellent, and engages our performances in the most noble scenes of action. Were men but induced to talk together of their eternal concerns with the same freedom and affection as they do of their temporal; were they to apply the same brightness of fancy, the same elegance of expression, the same delicacy of wit, the same force of argument to religious truths, as they employ with respect to worldly business and amusements, our conversation would then become heavenly, not only in point of holiness, but in point of pleasure and satisfaction too: men would be to one another as the angels of God, and piety would appear, as it really is, an amiable and an ornamental qualification. If any sparks of religion do remain in men's minds, an industrious concealment would be a certain means to stifle and extinguish them; conversation will serve to kindle them into an holy flame, and when our hearts are hot within us, the pious breathings of devotion will vent themselves, and communicate a godly warmth to those we converse with: this would give wonderful countenance to religion in the world; here the good man would meet with vast encouragement to pursue the course of virtue, when he is all along favoured with the approbation of others, as well as rejoiced by the applauses of his own conscience: here shame would be turned upon the ungodly, and he must in his own defence be obliged to pay a due outward regard to religion, that he may become like the rest of mankind: and thus were there a sufficient number of good men, *who out of the good treasure of their heart, would in this way, bring forth good things*, the pious zeal they express for God's glory would raise and animate the like zeal in others; *The mouth of the righteous would then become a well of life, and their lips would feed many.*

But because some indulgence is to be given even to the iniquity of the times, and acts of goodness must be sometimes withholden, when we are sure they will take a wrong turn; it may be proper to subjoin a direction or two with respect to religious conversation, which may tend to preserve, or rather recover the use of it, and at the same time, if possible, take off from the disgust of it; and that is, in general we ought to avoid the just imputation of those charges, which we before mentioned are generally cast upon religious discourse, viz. hypocrisy and formality.

Now these two charges thus far fall in with one another, that the greatest hypocrites are generally the most formal, because when people are acting a part, they are very apt to exceed nature; and it may possibly be thought by the actors of hypocrisy, that their inward foulness requires a great deal of outward dawbing to conceal it. Religious discourse therefore should be easy and unaffected, to shew that it is the natural outgoings of the soul, the true bent and genuine disposition of the mind: it should be cheerful, to shew that peace and joy are the effects which religion hath upon us, and by that means to engage others to make religion their study and business, that it may have the like effects of pleasure and comfort upon them: it should be apposite, otherwise it will appear forced and constrained, and consequently disagreeable: time, place, occasion, company, &c. are all to be taken into consideration, otherwise religious discourse may frequently make a very undue mixture, and *pearls* be often *cast before swine*. What is said of religious matters will likewise bid fair for having a good effect, when it is short; many occurrences may excite a pious remark, but would very improperly engage a long discourse: conversation is most entertaining, when subjects as well as persons have all their proper share in it, when a few words convey strong ideas, and more is implied by them than expressed. Religion is at best thought an insipid sort of discourse, and it is a great chance if it be not quite nauseated, when tediousness is added to the prejudices men already entertain against it; a lively expression touches the heart irresistibly, but a long lecture is apt to tire the ears too much to find any farther passage: above all, let our actions

speaking the praises of religion, and our good discourse be backed with good living: to take God's covenant in our mouth, at the same time that our hands deal with wickedness, is the severest reproach we can cast upon religion; it is crying to our Lord, *Hail, King of the Jews!* and then *buffetting him and spitting on him*. It may indeed be turned as an argument for religion, that in this case men are even forced to confess it against themselves; but the world will scarcely be brought into that way of conceiving, they pay a much greater regard to men's actions than their words, and form their judgment of things much more upon example than precept: it would therefore give great weight and influence to what we say, provided the holiness of our lives did come up to the piety of our talk; though on the other hand it must be confessed, that it would be too great a check to good discourse, if men were obliged to say no more of religion than they really practise.

It may seem strange to apologize for religious discourse in a christian country; but it has plainly fallen into such an entire disuse among us, that the revival of it will require all prudential management, and it must be matter of address to bring it into life again with any advantage. This head of discourse has taken up too much time to allow us to proceed to the other heads at present; but it will be proper to observe here, that though men have forgot their duty with respect to religion, they have not so entirely forgot religion itself; but they can talk of it with irreverence, and treat it with defiance and mockery: great part of common talk now is in the highest degree corrupt; the obscenities and prophaneities which have so large a share not only in vulgar, but even in what is called polite discourse, shew there is great occasion to inculcate this precept of the apostle, since mankind do so wonderfully mistake the proper topics, and instead of such communication as reason might improve by, and holiness take delight in, they fall into the basest corruptions, as though they were labouring in point of conversation to transform themselves into either brutes or devils. It has been the constant practice of all ages to complain of the superior viciousness of the present times, because men fix upon the most reigning

reigning vice, and compare the present and the former times with respect only to that particular; and certainly impure and irreligious discourse is become extremely fashionable among us, far above the practice of former ages: there seems to be one way of forming a judgment of what common discourse was in any age, and that is from the stage-entertainments which were then in vogue; for they, being intended to represent common life, do generally speak the language of the times they were wrote and acted in; and, what is a wonderful reproach to us, the plays which seem to give the greatest satisfaction at present, turn entirely almost upon filth and impiety; they thus far indeed come up to their character, that they represent what common life now is; but it would be more to our credit and advantage if they were to represent rather what it ought to be. Without doubt corrupt communication insinuates wonderfully among us by their means, and posterity (if those performances ever come to the hands of posterity) will find us represented in them under very odious colours. If therefore the absolute unlawfulness of such entertainments be thought too severe a doctrine, yet this we may affirm, that were not only christianity, but even common modesty and virtue, to direct our choice of those entertainments, the stage could not at all subsist upon its present foot. As to obscene discourse, it is utterly abhorrent to common decency and good manners; it is poisonous indeed, but withal so very odious, that to well-disposed persons it carries with it its own antidote; and he who does not nauseate it, must have a mind extremely vicious and corrupt; but the luxury with which it is generally uttered and received, shews that mankind are at this time fond of taking in the very dregs of pollution. Prophane discourse is a vice, that of all others has the least foundation; for it is surprizing, that amidst all those bright and exalted characters, under which we may and ought continually to view and adore the Divine Majesty, we will nevertheless be labouring to turn his being and attributes, his word

and his works into ridicule and contempt, and that this should be esteemed a great degree of wit and good sense. There is indeed a sort of wit which consists in joining together very desperate ideas; as when grand affairs are put into a degrading light, or trifling affairs are mentioned under grand circumstances. Now jesting in sacred matters is certainly joining together very desperate ideas; but if this is done without something of reason to support it, it is not then wit, but absurdity. In common life matters of a more serious nature will not bear to fall under ridicule: to have a buffoon determining upon life and death; a man behaving merrily in the extremest dangers, &c. are circumstances entirely out of character, and plainly bespeak folly and madness: but how much more so is it in divine matters? to see a worm endeavouring to outbrave Omnipotence; to see a man that is crushed before the moth, contemning the majesty of heaven, and ridiculing infinite perfection, trifling about his eternal welfare, and jesting with eternal damnation, are monstrous instances of absurd and daring iniquity. But thus it is that men suffer themselves to be deceived in what is fashionable, (especially if what is fashionable be likewise wicked,) that they will extravagantly approve and act over that in their most important concerns, which common reason would condemn in the very lowest affairs of life; they will form the slightest and weakest judgment there, where they ought to employ the utmost caution and exactness; and rather than not gratify a wanton vicious humour, they will give up the very principles of common sense. But however they may deceive themselves, God is not mocked; the Almighty will at length pour down infinite vengeance upon the prophane for all their impious jestings and foolish laughter; and however industriously they avoid the character of hypocrites here, they will not be able hereafter, without a very severe repentance, to ward off the partaking with hypocrites in their punishments, *weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth.*

S E R M O N CXI.

The same subject, continued.

EPHES. iv. 29.

Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth: but that which is good for the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers.

THESE words seem intended to regulate the common conversation of men with one another; the subject matter of which, for distinction sake, may be reduced to the three heads of such discourse, as doth more immediately relate to God, our neighbour, and ourselves: the first of these heads, viz. *Religious Discourse*, hath been already largely treated of; the second head, which is such conversation as doth more immediately concern our neighbour, and which may properly go under the name of *charitable discourse*, comes next to be considered.

Now this sort of discourse may be branched out into two particulars, as it may either relate to those we converse with, or to those whom we talk about. We shall come up to the duty of charity with respect to those we converse with, by treating them with an obliging plainness; with plainness, to shew the sincerity; with an obliging plainness, to shew the goodness of our nature. The former of these is opposed to flattery, which is apt to feed the vanity of men; the latter to rudeness, which always gives disgust. If men were to pursue these extremes, they would meet together either to deceive or to quarrel with one another, and the whole of conversation would turn either upon panegyrick or satire, both which are breaches of charity; for *charity rejoiceth in the truth*, but so, that if it be possible, and as much as in her lieth, she will give no offence by it.

Flattery is a vice of great meanness and falsehood in the person by whom it is offered, and proceeds upon the supposition of pride and folly in the person on whom it is bestowed. The flatterer's first business is to make you extremely pleased with yourselves, in hopes doubtless to receive large fruits from this good humour of his own raising; in order to this he new-models your character to such a degree, as to make you an entire creature of his own, by attributing to

you excellencies, which you have not, and magnifying those you have: the whole therefore of a flatterer is a lie, and a lie is the lowest degree of baseness, because there is nothing so servile and disingenuous to which he will not submit: but he is dangerous as well as base; he will lay himself at your feet, but it is with an intent to make you fall; and he never fawns but with a design to bite, or do you mischief: so that flattery is an abuse of speech, not only because it is made up of falsehood, but likewise because it is made up of uncharitable falsehood: the satisfaction it gives a man in himself, being founded upon imaginary merit, must necessarily be attended with pride, and must prevent the most useful part of knowledge, viz. the knowledge of himself.

It is seldom that men choose to look into themselves, and then they do it slightly and under strong prejudices; but flattery heightens those prejudices, it thereby varies the prospect exceedingly, and hinders a true and thorough inspection. Self love is too apt to paint us in fictitious colours, and is fond, without doubt, of any advantage it can receive from abroad: flattery therefore gains an easy access to the heart, by striking in with so prevailing a passion, and by taking part so entirely with our fancy, finds but little difficulty in overcoming our reason. Compliment a poor man upon his great wealth, a man in low station upon his great honours, and they will know their outward circumstances too well, not to think themselves ill-treated; but tell a man, that is never so indifferent in either respect, of his excellent qualities, or high accomplishments, if he does not truly believe much of them himself, he will at least hope that you do, and think himself obliged to you for your favourable conceptions; but it is a great chance, if he does not pay so much deference to your judgment, as to fall a little in with your professed opinion of him, and rise within himself upon the merit you falsely attribute to him: by this means he suffers a double prejudice, the world will soon pluck his borrowed plumes, and he will thereby be exposed to contempt; he will likewise most probably be somewhat elated, and by endeavouring to move in too high a sphere, will fall into the sin of pride, and into the misery both of con-

tempt

tempt and disappointment. Thus men may do more mischief by their soft than by their harsh speeches, and the *words which are smoother than oil, may yet be every sword.*

The other circumstance of charitable discourse, with respect to those we converse with, is that of an obliging plainness. To avoid one extreme to such a degree as to run into the quite contrary, is no uncommon failure in life; and many to shew their abhorrence of flattery, will give up common civility; and this is certainly a great breach of charity, because without a civil deportment, seeds of ill-nature are perpetually sowing, and must necessarily spring up into a plentiful harvest of anger, malice, hatred, enmity, &c. In conversation, truth is principally and more immediately to be regarded, but truth requires a decent dress; when it shews itself in derision or calumny, it makes too rough and slovenly an appearance to be at all beneficial, and it is much better perhaps to be silent even in useful truths, than to utter them with provocation. The notion of treating men as they deserve, and giving them what we call their own, is frequently thought to carry something of a shew of justice with it; but it hath nothing either of prudence or goodness; and it is a much greater argument of our malice, than of our regard for truth, to be designedly so open as to become offensive, and so plain, as to create odium to ourselves and uneasiness to others.

What frequently engages men in this extreme, is the affectation of wit. The notion of deriding other men for their follies, and railing at them for their vices, prevails wonderfully, because satire is thought to give a superiority to those who employ it, and sets a man up both for a wit and a reformer: but he who sacrifices his christian temper to his wit, shews more of ill-nature than good sense, and the truth and keenness of his satire will be no excuse for the uncharitableness and mischief of it. Reproof does not so properly fall under common conversation, as under private friendship: some sudden cases may be so aggravated as to require sharp and immediate correction, and there let prudence and charity determine how to apply it. In general those follies and vices which require most plainness, require the greatest address; re-

proof is too tender to be trusted in rough and unskilful hands, and satire, unless it be modestly managed, calls for that discipline it intends to inflict: courtesy is a gospel-duty as well as plainness, and in a polished sincerity it is that in this respect we see the perfection of grace and truth.

What hath been here said relates rather to the manner than matter of conversation, for the persons we converse with are not the proper subjects of talk; and no more should be said of them to themselves than what is barely necessary, because it is difficult to speak of any person without either commending or discommending, and consequently without approaching one of those extremes we before mentioned. It is no other than a christian part to make good-will and cheerfulness circulate briskly in life; but this must seemingly be done rather of course than with design, and the good as well as the bad conceptions we entertain of any person should, if necessary, be implied more frequently than expressed. If we find occasion to disapprove, it should be with modesty and address; if we approve, we should express ourselves in a natural and sparing manner; for men may surfeit even with deserved commendation, and over-charge with just applauses. In short, charity is to be regarded here, and an open undersigning courtesy, which pays a manly deference to superiors, an engaging condescension to inferiors, which prefers equals in honour, and provokes them in love, is the best method of performing it. But,

2dly, Proceed we now to consider the other branch of charitable discourse, viz. that which relates to those we converse about; and this is opposed to defamation; a vice extremely odious, but if possible even less odious than common: fall into any company whatever, and it is a great chance, if conversation does not run entirely this way, and every fresh person that is mentioned opens a fresh spring to calumny. This is a vice, which appears in every shape, and receives as many modifications, as there are diversities of tempers. The men of spirit are open-mouthed upon people's characters; the reserved deal out their scandal in hints and whispers; the formal lift up their eyes to heaven, and *thank God that they are not as other men are.*

These

These and many such like are the different ways of expressing defamation; so that there is no converging upon the common foot, without a large fund of censure and invective; and he bids fairest for being thought the best company, who knows the least of his neighbours' virtues, and the most of their failures.

Now to feed thus upon filth and carrion shews a palate wonderfully vitiated and sordid; to spend that time in spying and promulging the faults of others, which ought to be employed in correcting our own looks, as if it were the same thing to us, whether other people be wicked, or ourselves righteous, and as if our justification in the sight of God would turn indifferently upon their vices, or our own virtues.

The general root of this vice is a composition of pride and envy, and it shoots out into the most destructive branches of poisoning people's reputations; it is sinful therefore both in its rise and consequences: the devil himself is the grand defamer, and he hath many disciples, who, like him, *go to and fro in the earth, and walk up and down in it, like roaring lions and venomous serpents, seeking whom they can devour.*

Many are so absurdly proud as to lay claim to a good character without endeavouring to deserve it; this puts them upon envying those who deservedly possess what they so fondly desire, and envy always exercising itself on account of some supposed advantage of another, naturally obstructs every thing which may at all tend to that advantage. Here therefore defamation is interposed as a cloud to obscure the brightness of a fair reputation; and however some blemishes are made the immediate and plausible objects of detraction, yet excellencies are the real causes of it, and men frequently suffer in character, not so much because they deserve an ill name, as because they deserve a good one. Accordingly, it is commonly said, that slander is a tax upon merit (where we may barely observe, that there is at present either a great deal of merit in the world, or that the tax upon it runs extremely high); and if this be the case of slander, then it ought to prejudice us in favour of those who suffer it, at least it ought not to affect us much either way; it is so widely scattered, it is ta-

ken up upon such slight grounds, and ventured so much at random, that it hits indifferently the good and the bad, and is one of those things *which come alike to all*. There is no one who converseth in life, who cannot immediately recollect from what suspicions positive calumny is frequently raised; what falsities are purposely propagated, what virtues designedly misrepresented, what merit wilfully traduced; and what shews how great a share envy hath in this vice, few instances can be quoted where persons who have done publick good, have not done it in some measure at the expence of their good name: Accordingly, all men are ready in general to declare, that common report is a liar, but it is a liar which of all others is most easily believed; that principle of pride and envy, which gives rise to defamation, is universal, so that this vice thrives upon the same stock, and is kept up and improves by the same principle, from which it was first produced.

Thus we see that the origin of defamation is base and sinful, and the effects of it bear a proper proportion to its origin: its business is to rob people of what they esteem most valuable in life, their good name; to turn the world upside down with respect to characters, and to confound good and bad actions so as to subject them all indifferently to calumny and slander. The breath of a defamer is of an infectious nature, and tends to blast every thing it reaches. Reputation is a thing nicely constituted, fine and tender in its texture, which makes it more liable to accidents, and more easy to be destroyed. Let therefore a man's stock of merit be never so large and generous, let it branch out into actions never so virtuous and laudable, let it promise, let it have actually raised upon it fruits of praise and reputation never so fair and lovely, yet those fruits are within the reach and mischief of defamation, and the character of the purest innocence and most superior merit, if not quite destroyed, will nevertheless be sullied and deformed by it. Or, to make use of a Scripture similitude; *a good name*, says the wise man, *is better than precious ointment*; it has therefore a most grateful odour, it requires great pains and tedious application to attain it; it is to be preserved with

with great caution and diligence; yet this so pleasant, so costly, so valuable a treasure is wantonly to be destroyed and lavishly to be squandered away by every tongue that loves to utter false words: In this respect too a good name is like unto precious ointment, if it be once poured out, it is not to be recovered again, at least not to its first degree of purity; you may as well labour to drive a river back again into its fountain-head, as to trace scandal through all the channels it hath passed, up to its first author, and to leave those channels as pure as though it had not passed them; for men receive defamation with greediness, part from it with reluctance, spread it abroad with pleasure, retract it only upon the greatest force; and all this while our neighbour suffers in a most tender point: His reputation is the present reward of his labours, and a pleasing encouragement to him in his farther pursuit after virtue; it enables him to do good with greater advantage, and to suffer hardships with greater cheerfulness; it sets him up for a burning and a shining light to the world, and renders him a much more capable instrument of promoting God's glory and man's happiness. To rob him therefore of his reputation is doing him substantial mischief; robbing him of his money, which may be restored to him a thousand ways, bears no proportion to it. That which so greatly aggravates the sin of murder, is, that it is destroying the Divine image; and St. James gives that argument a forcible turn with respect to our speech; *the tongue, says the Apostle, is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison; therewith we bless God, even the Father, and therewith curse we men, which are made after the similitude of God.* And how far characters of innocence and virtue are more eminent circumstances of the Divine image, how far consequently effacing those characters hath it in the nature and partakes of the guilt of murder, is worth the defamer's while seriously to consider. It hath been a law in some countries, and it seems a law highly reasonable, to punish those who in a judicial way bear false witness, in the same manner as they would have punished the persons accused, had they been really guilty: and should the Almighty think

fit to take things in that view at the last day, what complicated guilt will they be oppressed with? what variety of vengeance must fall upon their heads, who have in conversation borne false witness against their neighbour in every kind and degree of wickedness?

Now it is certainly defamation in the worst degree, to bespatter innocence, and to invent and spread abroad scandalous falsehoods; but to publish even truths that are injurious, to discover the secret faults of our neighbours, to censure publicly what ought to be corrected privately, are likewise, degrees of defamation, and great breaches of charity, because it is the property of charity, in this respect likewise, *to cover the multitude of sins.* These circumstances arise from pride and envy, and are attended with the same ill consequences of ruining reputations, which may in the main be really good. Joseph, the husband of the blessed virgin, is called a just man for his tender intentions of putting away his espoused wife privately, and not making her a public example, when he discovered her to be with child; he not knowing at that time that what was conceived in her was from above. And indeed to publish the secret offences of others is sinful upon many accounts, because the exposing the actors of them to open shame, tends wonderfully to harden them in sin; it does not reclaim them from it, it plunges them deeper in guilt. Again, by making the vices of other men the subjects of common talk, we make the notions of wickedness less affecting, by rendering them more familiar. As all men fall under censure for their failures, persons who have been hitherto innocent, will be apt to think themselves singular in retaining their virtue, a singularity very few are fond of, and will imagine it will be very pardonable for them to run into those vices which conversation informs them are universal. Farther yet, this practice is a means of nourishing uncharitableness, inasmuch as thereby we view our neighbour always in the worst light, and paint him in such colours as make him odious to others: here therefore peace is broken in upon, good-will is choaked up, and a stop put to that general harmony and kindness, whereby so much present happiness

happiness flows in upon us. Yet under all those aggravating circumstances, defamation in every kind and degree of baseness makes the largest share in conversation, and is acted over hourly, deliberately, barefacedly, and even by those who would think themselves ill-treated not to be esteemed good Christians. From the serious and solemn manner wherewith they pronounce their calumnies, one would be apt to imagine, that it is really their business and duty to sit in judgment upon people's reputations; and to deal out scandal in what proportions they think proper; but from the mischiefs which attend their decisions, from the fullness and uncharitableness of their procedures, one cannot but likewise believe that their tribunals, if they have any authority, must derive their authority from the king of darkness, and that Satan always suggests what sentences they are to pass.

This censoriousness in seemingly good people, goes under the notion of discountenancing vice; but it would answer the purpose of holiness, at least as well, and would be a much better exercise of our charity, to dwell a little now and then upon our neighbour's good qualities, and by that means to endeavour the encouragement of virtue.

In some cases indeed, where public justice requires it, or private admonition makes it advisable, where the baseness of a designing person makes common caution necessary, or the notoriety of facts makes open abhorrence our duty, there we are allowed to speak our minds with freedom: but these circumstances fall not so frequently and properly under common conversation, and in the general our talent at censure had much better be turned upon ourselves; and were we to look inward with any part of that accuracy which we employ with respect to others, we should find too much in ourselves to be corrected, to allow us leisure to attend to foreign reformatations. Let him who is without fault cast the first censure at his neighbour, and that ought entirely to stop the mouth of calumny. If this sort of reformation be a charity, let it, like other charities, begin with ourselves; and when *we have plucked the beam out of our own eye, then shall we see more clearly to pluck out the mote from our brother's eye.* But is

Judgment our business? God hath reserved that to himself, and hath commanded us not to judge by appearance, to judge nothing before the time. Defamation therefore is no part of a Christian's character, censure is even invading the divine prerogative; for as St. James argues excellently, chap. iv. ver. 11, 12, *Speak not evil one of another, brethren. He that speaketh evil of his brother, and judgeth his brother, speaketh evil of the law, and judgeth the law; but if thou judgest the law, thou art not a doer of the law, but a judge. There is one law-giver, who is able to save and to destroy: Who art thou, that judgest another?* But thus it is that men rather than not be uncharitable, will be prophane? rather than not injure their neighbour, will bid defiance to the Almighty.

Upon the whole then, with respect to this sort of conversation, we ought to think and speak of mankind with candor; to be slow to hear ill reports, to be slower yet to believe them, and never to be authors and promoters of them; to rejoice in the excellencies we see our neighbours possessed of, and cheerfully to bear a modest testimony, to their merit; a modest testimony, for commendation may exceed in point of prudence, when it does not exceed in point of justice; and large praises frequently raise the envy of those who hear them, and are answered with detraction: it is our duty to clear up the reputation of those who are unjustly traduced, and to smooth over those characters, which truth might censure, though charity ought not; to throw a veil of tenderness over those faults which are not notorious, and to endeavour a remedy of men's imperfections, without exposing them to open air: In short, we ought to conceive and speak of others in the same manner as we shall wish to have done at that day, when what we thought of in private shall be made as clear as the light, and what *we uttered in the closets, shall be as though it were spoken on the house tops.* But how will the slanderer and backbiter appear at that day, when the *secrets of all hearts shall be disclosed*, when traduced innocence shall shine forth in the brightness of glory, and the guilt of the defamer be shewn in the blackness of pride and malice; when every aggravation whereby they have heightened their

their neighbours faults, every instance of detraction whereby they have lessened their neighbours excellencies, every act of contemptuous derision, of uncharitable though true censure, every omission of vindicating injured characters, every industrious with-holding of due commendation, will add to the foulness of their own demerits; when they shall be judged, even as they have judged; when they shall be condemned, even as they have condemned, without mercy.

S E R M O N CXII.

The same subject, continued.

EPHES. iv. 29.

Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good for the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers.

HAVING already considered common conversation, as it relates more immediately to God and our neighbour, under the two heads of religious and charitable discourse, proceed we now, according to our proposed division, in the third place, to consider such matter of conversation as doth more immediately concern ourselves. In the former respects, duty is more apparently concerned, because prophaneness and obscenity, which are opposed to religious; flattery, rudeness, and defamation, whether true or false, which are opposed to charitable discourse, are all of them circumstances confessedly and directly sinful; but this last branch of conversation, which includes all other subjects of discourse whatever, may seem at first view, to be of too indifferent a nature to fall under precept, especially in this place, where it is generally expected that articles of strict divinity should be treated of rather than the affairs of common life, where instructions of piety ought rather to be inculcated, than those directions which it is the proper business of reason and prudence to suggest. But there is nothing so indifferent, as not to be capable both of a good and bad turn; nothing so minute in the most remote instances of duty, which the Gospel may not improve into a virtue, and consequently which may not fall under useful consideration in a christian way, though such points as these need not be so fre-

quently and largely insisted on, as those of greater importance.

Our blessed Saviour compares *the kingdom of heaven*, i. e. the kingdom of God's grace or the Gospel, *unto leaven, which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal till the whole was leavened*; which similitude well expresses how wonderfully the gospel insinuates itself into every part of our life; what an useful ferment it makes with respect to our whole behaviour; what a grateful tincture it gives to every one of our actions. No circumstance therefore of life is below a christian regard, since there is no circumstance of it, which may not fall under christian improvement.

But this topic is of itself far from being of a trifling nature; our blessed Saviour assures us, that we shall *give an account of every idle word*: where the term *idle* does not only signify blasphemous, but that likewise which has no good tendency, that which doth not answer any of the ends of discourse, either God's glory, or the good of ourselves or others.

Again, conversation takes up a great deal of our time, and a due management of our time is a most important concern; it is not sufficient not to employ it to ill purposes, we are to employ it to all the advantages we are able; it is therefore a misapplication of a most precious talent to spend much of our time, if not in such conversation as is not directly sinful, yet in such as is productive of no good: the notion of duty requires something positive, and we must not content ourselves with barely *ceasing to speak evil, we must learn to speak well*; not that we need to be continually dwelling on pious subjects: the affairs of this life challenge some regard, and may be managed in conversation to great advantage; our faculties call for improvement in a natural as well as a moral way, and such an improvement will be found on many accounts to be of true and absolute service. Farther yet, the tongue is a member of great consequence, for life and death are in the power of the tongue: it is likewise very unruly; give it but an innocent loose, and you will soon find it too headstrong to be again easily restrained; it is a member of all other the most forward and unwearied in exercise, and requires great care and diligence to exercise it aright:

aright : in much talk there is much danger, and he that multiplieth words, multiplieth mischiefs. As therefore society makes speech necessary, and as our corruptions make it dangerous ; as discourse streams forth into numberless channels, and as it is apt while it flows continually to degenerate, it will become us to guard against its ill tendency in every the most minute circumstance, to observe every channel through which it passes, and to endeavour to keep it up to its proper strength and purity. And that we may the better be able to do this, let us proceed,

I. To consider what are proper topics for discourse under this branch of our division, and

II. We may remark a little upon those, which, however improperly, are nevertheless generally made the topics of common conversation.

Ist, Then, let us consider what are proper topics for discourse under this branch of our division.

Now the end of conversation being both to improve and gratify, we may consider what topics those are which with respect to this life fall under these two heads. The proper topics for improvement, are such as tend to enlarge our minds, to exercise our reason, to inform our understanding, to encrease our knowledge, &c. in a natural way. Topics for gratification, are such as tend to polish and civilize society, as render mankind pleased with one another, and give life a cheerful mixture of innocence and complacency. The first of these sorts are arts and sciences, observations drawn from history or experience, &c. Now it is our duty to converse upon such subjects, because it is our duty to improve in every instance of excellence which it hath pleased the Almighty to place within the reach of our abilities ; the more we know, the more we are enabled to glorify our Great Creator, and to benefit mankind ; and conversation is an obvious means of improving in all sorts of knowledge ; it lets us into men's thoughts of things, and we are thereby either confirmed or rectified in our own judgments ; we likewise make our own notions more intimately our own, by expressing them to others : our inward conceptions are, as it were, the embryos of knowledge, which would frequently prove abortive,

did not conversation give them their true life ; we always feel more strong impressions of that which we labour to inculcate, and become best informed ourselves by endeavouring to inform others.

These topics of discourse relate not only to the learned, but to every person whatever : there is no one so ignorant, as not to know something at least of some art or science ; no one so dull, as not to be able to make some observations for regulating the conduct of human life : men of low capacities and attainments cannot indeed converse so well as men of more deep and extensive knowledge, but they can converse according to their knowledge, and wherever there is any knowledge, there is room for improvement.

Again, such discourse as this is a great spur to industry ; difficulties in conversation are made extremely slight, and men are fond of endeavouring to act over that in reality, which is so easily transacted in common talk ; business passeth off much better when men are apprized of the necessity and practicableness of it from others, and we are more able to struggle in life to advantage by understanding the various turns of affairs, the different tempers of men, and the due management of those tempers : all this while the mind is cultivating and fitting itself for brighter scenes of action, raising itself out of the cloudy regions of brutality and ignorance, into a state of a more refined humanity, and in all respects becoming more capable of doing public service.

The other branch of proper topics for discourse, with respect to the things of this life, are those of gratification ; the mind of man is too weak to be always upon the stretch ; serious points are apt to fatigue, when long attended to ; it requires something lively and refreshing in conversation to keep up our spirits to their proper pitch, and to allow them their full scope of acting ; here then agreeable excursions of wit, brisk turns of fancy, &c. are very allowable, to give a relaxation to the mind, and to dispose of it for the prosecution of what is more serious : this indeed falls in with the inferior faculties of the soul ; but the inferior faculties ought to have their proper exercise, and the imagination may indulge itself in humorous subjects, as long

long as it is confined within the bounds of innocence and discretion: topics of this sort are infinite; the common occurrences of life will never fail to furnish them out to us in large quantities; and it is rather our business to manage them aright, than to discover what they are. It may be proper barely to mention, that we ought to choose those topics which are most manly, because though we are to be diverted by such conversation, we are to be diverted like rational creatures, and the satisfaction we meet with in this way at least to be what common sense may approve: again, such discourse should not engross too much of our time, because it is absurd to turn what should only amuse into an employment, and to make that a real business which is intended only to relieve from the fatigues of business. Upon the whole then, that conversation which more immediately relates to ourselves, and turns chiefly upon the affairs of this life, will, when rightly managed, serve many good purposes; it is improving, it is agreeable, it enlarges and refines the soul, it promotes mutual kindness and society, it is a constant spring of cheerfulness and good nature, it fills up time at least innocently, and prevents those abuses of speech with respect to this branch of our diversion, which it is our own business now in the

2d place to remark a little upon.

Conversation, with respect to the affairs of this life, generally turns upon vain and impertinent topics; fashions, dress, diversions, entertainments, &c. are subjects which are most seriously argued upon and solemnly discussed; so that if we were to judge of life from common discourse, the whole business of it is errand foppery. Now this betrays great levity of mind, and tends wonderfully to weaken and enervate our superior faculties: he who labours to be learned upon such articles as those, finds out but a mean employment for his reason, and may converse for ages without advancing one step forwards in wisdom: such discourse answers no purpose at all: he must have but little understanding who thinks it improving, and he but a bad taste, who thinks it agreeable: it is not indeed in the worst sense corrupt communication, but it is so far corrupt, that it is unedifying; it neither is of service to the speakers, neither doth it *minister grace unto the*

bearers; it is at least an unprofitable method of squandering away time; it is a debasement of our minds, and a neglect of improving ourselves in those instances of knowledge, which it hath pleased the Almighty to give us capacity for attaining, and which we might be able to turn to public service. This may possibly seem a needless and unreasonable piece of severity, to abridge conversation to such a degree, as to cut off from it so many topics, which are generally thought at least innocent and inoffensive, especially since they lie level to the top capacities of many persons in life; so that if those persons be debarred discoursing in this way, they must be entirely secluded from bearing any share in all conversation whatever. But let it be considered, that the debasement of our faculties is a perversion of them; that the non-improvement of our talents is an abuse of them, and that vain discourse is sinful, as well as that which is profane and uncharitable. We ought therefore to be extremely careful what turn our conversation takes, because trifling discourse is apt to grow wonderfully upon us, and betrays us insensibly into such levities as common reason would industriously decline, as true sobriety would be ashamed of, and, since we are to *give an account of every idle word*, such as christianity would be afraid of incurring. Here it is obvious to reflect how severe a judgment those persons must pass, who employ both their time and study in this way, so far as even to bring this sort of conversation into rule and method, those, whose whole life is spent in impertinent visits, and whose visits are made up of idle discourse.

But there is one topic of this sort of conversation which deserves to be more particularly taken notice of, because it is very common and very mischievous, and that is talking about other people's business. Now this habit arises from a trifling curiosity, which tends to no end, and can serve no purpose; yet if you name any indifferent person, it is a great chance if you do not hear his whole history, his pedigree, his alliances, his economy, his behaviour, his miscarriages, his lucky accidents, his views in life, &c. all are enlarged upon; what he does in his closet, let it be never so innocent, will be as though it was done upon the

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house top; his motions are observed, his actions examined, his designs enquired into, and the man scrutinized in every particular.

This is not indeed so properly defamation, because nothing scandalous perhaps is spoken, but it is very prejudicial upon many accounts; it is a large step towards defamation; and it can scarcely be imagined, that where there is so exact a survey taken of any person, and so much talk about him, that there will not start up a great deal of scandal; besides, this gives occasion to designing men to make an ill use of many circumstances, which may be in themselves innocent and commendable, and which, though very proper to be done, are not proper to be commonly known: again, this represents men's affairs in a very undue and partial light, because the putting together a few disjointed outward appearances will make a man's behaviour seem very inconsistent, as though we were to form our judgment of a large machine from a few wheels which have immediate relation with one another. In order to talk of men's affairs truly, we ought to know their springs and motives of action; and in all indifferent matters, it is much better to leave them to judge for themselves, because they understand the whole of the case, and best know their own circumstances, and those who judge by appearance seldom judge righteous judgment; this therefore exposes those they talk of to the world, by placing the truth that relates to them in an imperfect view, and mixing a great deal that is false with it; for men of this cast of mind frequently improve suspicions into certainties, and have always a fancy strong enough for large invention.

St. Peter calls such men *busy bodies in other men's matters*; the original word for which may be more literally translated *overseers of other men's matters*. Now it argues great pride and forwardness in those who take upon them this general inspection; it carries with it the air of guardianship over mankind, as though no action ought to escape their notice, and all business whatever should fall under their cognizance. *Who made me a judge or a divider over you?* says our blessed Saviour to the person who desired him to interpose about dividing an inheritance; but had any one else

been applied to, the case would probably have been immediately taken in hand. In short, there is a strange fondness in mankind to meddle with the affairs of others, and that to a great degree of neglecting their own; and this is a principle of pride and wantonness in its origin, and of mischief in its effects; it is entirely contrary to modesty, good nature, and good sense; it bears no Christian marks at all about it, it being a gospel, as well as a prudential precept, *That every man should study to be quiet, and to do his own business*; and we find those persons sharply reprimanded by St. Paul, who *learn to be idle, wandering from house to house, and not only idle, says the apostle, but tattlers and busy bodies, who speak things which they ought not*.

Thus then have we considered the matter of conversation with respect to God, our neighbour, and ourselves, and shewed how subservient we might make our speech to God's glory and to the benefit of ourselves and others; but it is notorious how corrupt our communication is in every instance of it, inso-much that the true use of speech is entirely perverted, and what was intended by the Almighty for the advantage of society, is really turned into the bane and pest of it. Now that which requires to be so largely and thoroughly reformed necessarily engages a more minute consideration; but whatever is or can be said of this sort is so well known from continual experience, that the familiarity of it takes off from the impressions which might otherwise be made concerning it, and we shall not be so well able to judge of the guilt and mischiefs of common conversation as by removing it to some distance, and seeing it without partiality.

Let any one, therefore, after he hath spent many hours in that which is called good and engaging company, seriously examine with himself what useful improvement either in a moral or a natural way he can make of the conversation that has passed, and it is a great chance if he be made a whit the wiser or better for it; it may be well perhaps if he carries away as much innocence and sobriety, or rather as little guilt and levity, as he brought with him.

Or rather let us suppose an hermit, one who hath long sequestered himself from

from human society, and in a manner forgot the use of speech, but one who hath improved his mind, as far as solitude would allow, in meditating on the Divine nature and his own being, who hath employed his rational faculties wholly in the search after more exalted truths, and hath enlarged his soul by the bright notices of virtue and holiness, and the glorious hopes of bliss and immortality: Suppose we then that such an one was informed how much he had neglected a most useful talent; that the Almighty made man a sociable creature, and that discourse is a fund of vast improvement, that speech opens the hearts of men, and lets us into many worthy notions without pains or difficulty, that *as iron sharpeneth iron, so doth the conversation of men one another*; that we may become wise upon their stock of knowledge, by transcribing into our own minds their well-digested sentiments, that learning flows from this fountain in large streams, and that we may drink deeply of the waters of instruction with ease and pleasure: upon such intimations as these, how would the hermit lament his tedious labours after a solitary knowledge, and the neglect of so large and obvious a method of improvement? With what eagerness would he break out from his retirement? With what expectation would he run into society? But when upon trying all companies, and hearing the discourse which prevails among all ranks and orders of men, he finds conversation the source of iniquity, and the tongue the grand instrument of mischief; when instead of praising and adoring our great creator, he hears oaths, blasphemies, and prophaneness; instead of pure and holy discourses, he hears filthiness and obscenity; instead of sincere and charitable expressions with respect to our neighbour, he hears flattery, rudeness and defamation, and even what is esteemed most innocent and inoffensive in conversation, when instead of such discourse as we might improve by in a natural way, such as our reason might enjoy with satisfaction, and our fancy might suggest for a masculine entertainment, he hears nothing but folly, vanity and impertinence, how wretchedly will he be disappointed in his pursuits? How impatiently will he long for his former

retirement? Would he not be provoked to take up his parable and say, *the heart of man is a polluted spring, and rivers of corrupt communication issue from it. How are the children of men lovers of vanity, and their delight is in lies! Their inward parts are very wickedness, the poison of asps is under their lips; their tongue is swift to shed blood; they speak all things that may do hurt; was the use of speech really given us for a blessing? Wherefore then doth it disquiet the whole world, driving men from nation to nation, pulling down strong cities, and overthrowing the houses of great men? The tongue casteth out virtuous women, and depriveth them of their labours. Who-so hearkened unto it shall never find rest, and shall never dwell quietly. The stroke of the whip maketh marks in the flesh, but the stroke of the tongue breaketh the bones. Many have fallen by the edge of the sword, but not so many as have fallen by the tongue. Well is he that is defended from it, and hath not passed through the venom thereof. But who is there that can escape it? It is a pestilence that walketh in darkness; its arrows destroy at the noon day; thousands fall beside it, ten thousands at its right hand. O! that I had wings like a dove, would he say, that I might flee away from this untoward generation, and be at rest? Surely there is greater pleasure in solitude, at least there is innocence. How is the world become a desolation and the wilderness a place of refuge! Woe is me, that I have conversed with mankind, and made my habitation among the sons of men! the roarings of lions are not so dangerous as their tongues; the dwellings of wild beasts abound with safety and civility in comparison of what human society produce.*

Upon the whole then can it be imagined that the use of speech was indulged to us for the uttering God's praises, for the mutual edification of ourselves and others? Can it be imagined, that we are placed here on earth in order to qualify ourselves for the conversation of saints and angels, and that our tongues are intended eternally to dwell upon divine hallelujahs? This indeed is the gracious design of the Almighty; and shall not the prospect of that blissful employment engage us to set a watch over the door of our lips, and to render our discourse such as becomes the gospel of Christ, such at least as is commonly vir-

tuous and innocent? If our souls are to be greatly purified and exalted in order to our being made meet partakers of heavenly joys, and if conversation be a proper and necessary means for working out for us such improvements, then does it behove us in every instance of conversation to remember the dignity of our being, and to act up to the worthiness of our vocation, that no corrupt communication of any sort may ever proceed out of our mouth.

But more especially when we are called upon to be guests at God's table, let us consider, that in vain shall we endeavour to purify our thoughts, unless we likewise purify our discourse; because *he who seemeth to be religious and bridleth not his tongue, that man's religion is vain*, saith the apostle; and we cannot be guilty of a greater profanation of our Lord's supper, than by receiving those holy mysteries into a mouth, through which streams of corruption are continually flowing. Let therefore the purifying coals of God's altar, while they enflame our minds with pious dispositions, enrich our mouths likewise with the devoutest thanksgivings; that when our hearts are ready, we may praise the Lord with the best member that we have; that that meekness and charity which the gospel inspires, that innocence and simplicity which adorn a Christian conversation, may run through all our discourse; and that while we minister grace unto the hearers, we may treasure up our own justification against that day, wherein *by our words we shall be justified, and by our words we shall be condemned*.

S E R M O N CXIII.

By ANDREW SNAPE, D.D.

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'The Inexcusableness of obstinate Impenitence.

EZEK. xviii. 31.

—For why will ye die, O house of Israel!

THE Almighty, through this whole chapter, is expostulating with the re-

bellious house of Israel: who, as if it had been a small thing that they had violated his commands, profaned his name, defiled his altars, and prostituted his worship, as if it had not been enough that they had been guilty of gross idolatry, notorious oppression, and foul adultery, with other very heinous and provoking crimes here recited, proceeded yet farther to murmur against God, to represent him as a cruel and unjust being, and to exclaim against the partiality of his dispensation, and the severity of his punishments. So ready are men to charge their own miscarriages upon God, and to recriminate when they cannot make a direct answer to that which they are accused of; and so true is the observation of the wise man, *that when the folly of a man has perverted his ways, his heart fretteth against the Lord*, Prov. xix. 3.

A God so impiously, a benefactor so ungratefully, a Judge so insolently treated, might justly have been expected to have proceeded in another manner, and to have spoke in another language than in affectionate wishes and pathetic exhortations, in gentle expostulations and terms of endearment.

But what provocations are beyond the endurance of infinite mercy; to how prodigious a bulk must that guilt be swelled, which is more extensive and unbounded than divine love.

Thus audaciously challenged and affronted, we find him notwithstanding so far from an implacable rage, and inflexible resolution of avenging his injured honour, that he still persists in his endeavours by soft and gentle methods to work their reformation and prevent their ruin.

He who was bound by no other rule but the inherent rectitude of his own nature, whose peculiar right it was to require an account of their actings, vouchsafes to give them an account of his; he argues the case calmly and familiarly with them, and appeals to their own reason, whether he did not, both in the execution of his punishments, and the distribution of his rewards, proceed according to the strictest rules of equity: *hear now, O house of Israel, says he, are not my ways equal? are not your ways unequal?* After which conviction he still leaves it to their choice, whether they will be happy or miserable; and perceiving them more inclinable to the

the latter, he addresses himself to them in this other passionate interrogatory, *For why will ye die, O house of Israel!*

Blessed God! was it not enough for Thee, who art accountable only to Thyself, to be conscious of Thy own justice, but must Thou appeal to sinful men, and make the criminals the judges? But this indeed leaves them without excuse, and it must of necessity follow from such a display of Thy goodness and their perverseness, that, as thou art self-justified, so they are self-condemned.

From the words of the text I shall consider these following particulars:

I. The patient forbearance and long-suffering of a gracious God.

II. The obstinate impenitence of a disobedient people.

III. The consequence that will infallibly attend such a state of final impenitence, viz. death. *Why will ye die?*

IV. That if we so finally miscarry and meet with eternal death for our portion, we have nobody to complain of but ourselves; it is our own voluntary choice, and we might have prevented it if we would. *Why will ye die?*

I. The first thing observable is the patient forbearance and long-suffering of a gracious God. This is a reflection that is always full of unspeakable comfort and satisfaction: This is the foundation of all our hopes, the source of our pardon and security of our happiness; to this we owe the delay of our punishment, and every fresh opportunity of repentance; hither is the only retreat for a wounded conscience, and sanctuary for despairing guilt. *If God should be extreme to mark what is done amiss; if he should show no forbearance, and his threats would admit of no respite or mitigation, but every transgression of his law were to be prosecuted with the utmost rigour; who then could endure the severity of his wrath? or who is that upright unblameable person, that could stand the fury of his naked justice? It is of his mercy alone that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not. He spares when we deserve punishment, and his wrath thinks upon mercy.*

Nay, so long does he bear with men's iniquities, and suspend the execution of his judgments, that we are sometimes ready to censure his indulgence, and tax

him with too much lenity, and even to upbraid him, as it were, as David did with a *quousque Domine?* Lord, how long wilt thou look upon this? How long shall the adversary do this dishonour? Why pluckest thou not thy right-hand out of thy bosom to destroy the enemy?

We repine at his goodness toward others, as Jonah did when he reversed his sentence against Nineveh: *I pray thee, O Lord, says he, was not this my saying, when I was yet in my country? Therefore I fled before unto Tarshish: for I knew that thou art a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger and of great kindness, and repentest thee of the evil,* Jon. iv. 2.

And as to our imitation of God in this particular, (as it is our duty to imitate all his attributes and perfections, as far as our frail nature will permit us,) we are so far from bearing with a true Christian patience, real, accumulated, and repeated affronts, that we are frequently transported beyond all patience and moderation by seeming and imaginary ones; our sufferance is seldom any longer than till we have an opportunity of requiting the injury, and our inability to be avenged as we would, has often a considerable share in our forgiveness.

There are indeed some degrees of ill usage, which good nature and a sense of religion will teach a man to overcome; but it is very rare that either the one or the other are a sufficient proof against that resentment that is occasioned by reiterated wrongs, and repeated provocations.

St. Peter himself, we see, was afraid of going too far in this duty, and of suffering too long: he was very solicitous to know of his master, to what degree he was obliged to bear with injuries, without endeavouring to return them; how many severe trials he must sustain, how many acts of forbearance he must put in practice, before forgiveness might lawfully end, and revenge begin to take place.

Lord, says he, *how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Until seven times?* And thought, no doubt, that he had stated the case disadvantageously enough to himself, and that he had rather exceeded than fallen short of that measure of charity his Lord would expect from him. But you know what our

Saviour's answer was; *I say not unto thee, until seven times, but until seventy times seven.*

We must not therefore confine our pardon and oblivion to any limited number of offences; but as often as our brother renews his provocation, so often must we our forgiveness, especially where he makes an acknowledgment and submission, and expresses a desire to be forgiven.

Such is God's dealing towards us, and such would be ours towards our brethren, if we endeavoured to be like God. He, though he never wants the power to vindicate his honour, and has always his enemies at his mercy, chuses rather to proceed by gentle methods, and instead of compelling, endeavours to win them to his service; he courts them at once to their duty and their happiness, invites them earnestly to a reconciliation with him, and solemnly declares, in the twenty-second verse of this chapter, that if they will but turn from all the transgressions they have committed, they shall not so much as be mentioned to them. Nay he promises them not only pardon and oblivion, but an inestimable reward. And if ever he has recourse to harshness and severity, it is as it were unwillingly and with some reluctance; so unwillingly, that the prophet Isaiah calls it *alienum opus*, a strange work, i. e. a work that can hardly be called his; it is so foreign to his purpose, and offers such a sort of violence to his nature; *He shall be wroth, says the prophet, as in the valley of Gibeon, that he may do his work, his strange work, and bring to pass his act, his strange act*, Isaiah, xxviii. 21.

How slow he is to wrath, how backward and loth to punish, we have a remarkable instance in the long suspension of his judgment toward the inhabitants of the old world. *One hundred and twenty years bore he their iniquities, which were then at the height; for all flesh (we are told) had corrupted their ways upon earth:* And in the mean time Noah, a preacher of righteousness, gave them warning of the danger that attended them, that he who had so lately made them, would again destroy the whole race of them, by an universal deluge, if they did not timely prevent it, by acknowledging their creator, and forsaking their abominable profaneness and corruption.

And to show how much he was in earnest, and how thoroughly he was persuaded himself of the reality of that danger, with the apprehension whereof he laboured to possess them, they saw the ark which he was preparing for the security of himself and family, (who alone were free from that general pollution wherewith the rest of the world were overspread,) and without doubt they looked upon it as an extravagant project, as a piece of groundless fear and ridiculous superstition, (as many do now-a-days the terrors of a future judgment, and the fear of an avenging deity,) but at last the flood came, foretold indeed as to the certainty of the event, but unexpected as to the proper time; and if it left them time for such thoughts, it made them wish that they had either hearkened to the instruction of Noah, or followed his example; that they had either prevented the deluge, or provided an ark too.

And this leads me to the

Second thing I proposed to treat of, viz. the obstinate impenitence of a disobedient people.

It was the complaint of God himself, that all the day long he had stretched forth his hands to a disobedient and gainsaying people; that after he had cultivated his vineyard with the utmost care, yet when he expected it should have brought forth grapes, it brought forth wild grapes.

There is somewhat so highly ungrateful and disingenuous in some tempers, that no favours can win, no excess of courtesy can oblige them; he that heaps on them kind and good offices, only heaps to himself affronts; they grow presumptuous by indulgence, and insolent by forbearance; the very strength they borrow emboldens them to contend with him that lent it, and those very motives that should excite them to love and honour, to praise and celebrate their benefactor, do on the contrary beget in them nothing but ingratitude and rebellion.

Such is the dealing of wicked men toward God. He bears with their iniquities, and connives at their transgressions; he spares them when they deserve punishment, and long suspends the execution of his judgments; nay, instead of punishing, he blesses, and makes them prosper as to their

their temporal concerns: he makes his sun to shine upon the wicked as well as good, and sends down rain on the just and on the unjust. To the intent that so much lenity and goodness may at last soften and civilize their rugged nature, and either allure, or reason, or shame them into a compliance with his will.

But such is their perverse obstinacy, that all these engaging arts and endearing methods of divine love have a quite contrary effect; they are so far from relenting at the thoughts of God's forbearance, that it hardens them the more; and instead of admiring his goodness, they distrust his power; they conclude he either cannot or will not punish, since he has born already with so many provocations; and because *sentence against their evil works is not executed speedily, therefore their hearts are fully set in them to do evil.* (Eccl. viii. 11.)

St. Peter indeed foretold, that there should be a set of such unkind and ungrateful reasoners. *There shall come, says he, in the last days, scoffers, walking after their own lusts, and saying, where is the promise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation,* (2 Pet. iii. 3.) i. e. They should argue against a judgment to come from God's patient enduring the corruption of the world, without being provoked to send down a speedy destruction on the race of men, but letting things go on in a regular and even course, without any great or remarkable change: but in answer to this, he puts them in mind of one memorable change that had already happened, viz. the destruction of the world by water, and warns them of another that was yet to come, when it should again be destroyed by fire. And they therefore who obstinately continue in their sins, in confidence of God's patience, do as St. Paul speaks; *they despise the riches of the long suffering of God which should have led them to repentance. But after their hardness and impenitent hearts, treasure up unto themselves wrath against the day of wrath, and revelation of the righteous judgment of God.* (Rom. ii. 4, 5.) As will farther appear in my

Third particular, in which I am to set forth the consequence that will attend such a state of impenitence, or perseverance in sin, (viz.) death. *Why will ye*

die? For although God has no pleasure at all that the wicked should die, though he had rather he should return from his ways and live; yet it is his decree that such as will not return, shall not live. And they who will not serve his purposes in the way he best likes, will be made the instruments of his will in a more fatal and destructive sense; if his mercy cannot triumph over them, his justice will; and they who refuse to glorify him, as pardoned and reconciled enemies, must yet contribute to his glory as conquered rebels. This is the natural effect of sin, the appointed wages of unrighteousness; how calm and undisturbed, how thoughtless soever and free from care, men may be in a course of impiety, this will be the end that waits them, this melancholy subject still limits their prospect: Beyond this they can hope for no comfort, but have enough of horror, misery, and despair in view. Life and death are proposed as the reward of good and evil, and he who is irreclaimably bent and addicted to evil, cannot think it strange if he meets with death its inseparable associate and attendant.

By death I do not mean a bare separation of soul and body, a cessation of the vital function and retirement into the cold and solitary grave; for this is the common fate of righteous as well as wicked men, and both the one and the other must pass through this door into eternity. And though it does sometimes please the Almighty to serve some great and signal end of Providence, by making even temporal death the reward of daring guilt and outrageous impiety; though he has sometimes destroyed by supernatural means not only private and single persons, but even whole nations and communities, and once a whole world of sinners, (a very few excepted,) when their offences were grown up to a monstrous and unusual size; nay though death itself first entered into the world upon the first sin that was committed in our nature: yet the death that is here and elsewhere in holy Scripture denounced as the sure and unavoidable wages of unrepented sin, is of another kind, and has something in it far more severe and terrifying than a meer privation of being and extirpation from the land of the living. The agonies whereof will be far more racking and acute, its horrors infinitely more piercing and

insupportable than those of a poor dying wretch, that lies labouring for life, and groans, and pants, and gasps, and struggles to prevent, if possible, the fatal separation between the mortal and immortal part. This second death is not a transient act, but a permanent state; and they who shall be doomed to that heavy sentence, will die not once, but always: each moment of a miserable eternity will be more restless than the last uneasy moments of this present life; such burnings will continually be felt, to which the heat of a fever or calenture bear no proportion, ever raging and never intermitting, distorting convulsions, inexpressible anguish, and more than dying pangs.

Such will be the impenitent sinner's portion, this is the recompence provided for him by a justly incensed God: this cup of misery and sorrow must he now drink, who refused so often that of grace and salvation: and will he then complain of the severity of God? or will he not rather condemn himself, and accuse the heinousness of his own sins? which were so provoking as to put the Almighty under a sort of necessity of thus tormenting him, even against his will, and contrary to the tendency of his nature.

May he not justly say to thee, after so many warnings and opportunities offered by him, and by thee neglected, as he did once to the Jews, *O Israel, thy destruction is of thyself?* has he not long borne with thee as with the barren fig-tree? has he not dug about thee, and dunged and watered thee, to see if at last thou wouldst bring forth fruits meet for repentance? and if after so many trials thou art still found useless and unprofitable, canst thou think much if the sentence, pronounced against the fruitless tree, be thine: *cut it down, why cumbereth it the ground?*

God's spirit will not always strive with man; though he is long suffering, he is not eternally so; there is a degree of provocation beyond the endurance of infinite mercy, and there is a time when the day of grace will set, and that of judgment will rise: he is mighty to punish as well as to preserve, and infinitely terrible as well as lovely. When once his vengeance is awakened, and his resentment stirred up, we shall feel what it is to have wearied out such enduring patience, and insulted such forgiving goodness.

The conscious remembrance of our obstinate folly and black ingratitude will one day stare us in the face: and a thorough conviction that we have highly deserved the worst that can be inflicted on us, will be no inconsiderable part of our punishment, since it will not leave us even the wretched comfort of complaining of the hardship of our sentence, and the severity of our judge, but will oblige us, in despite of ourselves, to confess what I am now going to prove, in the

IVth place, that if we do finally miscarry, and meet with eternal death for our portion, we have nobody to complain of but ourselves, it is our own voluntary choice, and we might have prevented it if we would. *Why will ye die?* The misfortunes and calamities of this world do indeed frequently overtake the most provident and industrious, and he that has used all necessary precaution to guard himself against pain and sickness, poverty and disgrace, and other the evils and perplexities of this life, may, without any fault or mismanagement of his own, meet with crosses and disappointments, and be reduced to great extremities by sudden and unforeseen accidents. But no man can miscarry in his eternal concern, and be made more miserable in a future state, but by his own foolishness and ill conduct. He cannot be ungodly by chance, nor a sinner against his will: It is in the power of ill fortune to make him poor and despicable, but it can never make him wicked.

For though it must be granted, that we are set in the midst of many and great dangers, they are neither more nor greater than every man knows how to escape, if he will take pains. We are exposed indeed to trials and temptations, but no temptation hath taken us but what is common to men. God is faithful, who will not suffer us to be tempted above what we are able, but will with the temptation make also a way to escape.

That the sharpest of these trials is not insuperable, we make it evidently appear, by our cheerful and vigorous resistance of them, whenever they stand in competition with our worldly interests and designs.

It is easy for men to make some plausible pretences, and allege very specious arguments to colour the immorality of their actions; they may urge in their defence

fence the alluring pleasures of sense, and the irresistible bent of nature to close with these allurements; that the vices forbidden us are of absolute necessity, and the virtues commanded as absolutely impracticable, but yet there is scarcely any one that has not had so much trial of his faculties, as to be convinced that he can upon occasion abstain from the most alluring acts of sin, and perform the most difficult achievements, and severest duties the gospel requires of its professors.

I do not assert that every particular Christian has performed every positive and negative precept on a religious account, and in pure conformity to the will of God, (not but that I hope and am persuaded that there are very few who have not, at some time or other of their lives, submitted to the far greatest part of them, merely on principles of conscience,) but this I dare affirm with greater certainty, that there is scarcely a man to be found, but what on some human and prudential consideration, and to serve some secular end at least, has cheerfully and readily accomplished the most tedious and ungrateful of those actions, which, when really and sincerely intended to the glory of God, may justly be denominated virtues; which is as substantial an argument against the plea of natural incapacity, as if they were religious actions indeed.

For which, I would fain know, of all the duties of religion is it, be our aversion to it never so strong, which we cannot and do not surmount for the sake of our worldly interest and advantage? What lust so craving and importunate, that we cannot and do not refuse to gratify, rather than hazard our lives, ruin our fortune, or expose our reputations? there is no passion so exorbitant, no affection so ardent, no inclination so deep rooted which we do not daily tear from our breasts and sacrifice to those idols, whatever weakness and inability we pretend, when required to part with them for the sake of God.

To be more particular: is it a pain to be pious and devout? is it a toilsome and unreasonable task to frequent religious assemblies, and join in the public worship of God? Alas! how much more than this will the formal hypocrite perform, merely to make a show of religion, with-

out the substance and reality, and consequently without the reward of it? And shall we do less for the praise of God, than he for the praise of men? or is the approbation of our Almighty Judge less worthy to be regarded, than the false and mistaken applause of our fellow-criminals?

Again: is it a punishment to be restrained from cursing and blaspheming, to be obliged to check our unmannerly wit, and irreverent buffoonry, and to confine ourselves even in times of greatest liberty to an innocent mirth and inoffensive freedom? As great a restraint as it is yet sometimes the most petulant and profane, the most hardened and habitual swearers, in compliance with common decency, and respect to the company they are in, can put a bridle on their tongues and abstain from such offensive and shocking raillery.

Is civility and good breeding so much a more prevailing principle than the love of God? Has the presence of a man so much awe upon us, and the presence of God none?

Is it a severe and unreasonable task to be obliged to mortify our fleshly lusts, to deny the importunate cravings of nature, and abstain from the enjoyment of unlawful pleasure, though solicited by never so vehement desires, and invited by never so fair opportunities? This indeed is what too many are apt to complain of, as a very grievous and insupportable yoke, as a rigid and merciless imposition and invasion of their natural right. And yet this is nothing, if compared with those voluntary severities which these very murmurers inflict upon themselves. For where can there be any self-denial equal to that of the penurious wretched miser, who, to scrape together an useless treasure, foregoes all the pleasures and enjoyments of life, submits to the most vile and sordid shifts, denies himself not only conveniences, but even necessities too, and is half-famished in the midst of plenty?

Nor is the ambitious man less eager in the pursuit of empty honour. For this he does not scruple to expose himself to numberless hazards and fatigues; he is not at all discouraged with the hazard of life or loss of limbs, but makes it his choice, when he might indulge himself in ease and quiet, to freeze in a camp, or starve in a garrison.

These,

These, and a hundred other instances, which might be produced, are a sufficient confirmation how far the mere power of nature can go in resisting temptation, in enabling us to defy both pleasure and pain, and fortifying us as well against the softnesses and blandishments of prosperity, as against the trials and extremities of adverse fortune. If then by our natural strength alone we are able to do and suffer so much, with how much greater ease may we undergo the same discipline on a religious account, where we are sure of the assistances of grace, as well as of nature? So that in order to our becoming truly pious and good Christians, it is not necessary for us, in many cases, to act any otherwise than we do already, but only to perform the same action on better principles; and sure, barely to intend and mean well, is no such hard and rigorous imposition.

Let us be as temperate and sober, and as moderate in the use of corporal refreshments, for the sake of God and a good conscience, as many of us are to escape a fever, and others on the score of good husbandry, and to save the charges of a debauch. Let us mortify our carnal lusts, and abstain from fleshly gratifications, not so much to preserve our health and reputation, (though they also ought to be regarded,) as to secure our title to heaven, from the inheritance whereof all whore-mongers and adulterers shall be for ever excluded. In fine, let us be affectionately devout and zealous in God's service, not that we may gain the applause of men, but that we may approve and recommend ourselves to our heavenly Father, *who seeth in secret, and will not fail to reward us openly*. For sure, there can be no endeavours so vain, no labour so foolishly misplaced, as that of the hypocrite, who with half the pains he takes to be a good man, might be one in reality and good earnest.

There is nothing then so difficult in religion, but what may be overcome by a willing mind and settled resolution; we are all furnished with sufficient capacities to discharge our duty to God as we ought, which requires nothing more of us, except a good intent, than what we daily and customarily practise. Whatever our obstructions and discouragements are, it is certain our assistances are as great. If we have spiritual enemies to encounter, we

have spiritual armour to fortify us against them, if we will but be at the pains to put it on.

In short, we know what our duty is; we feel within ourselves a power of performing it, through the Divine assistance, which will never be wanting to such as faithfully implore it, and we know what will be the consequence if we do not. So that in case of our miscarriage after all, we must be looked upon as the authors and contrivers of our own ruin; our destruction is of ourselves, and if we will perish, we must. God himself has provided no remedy for inveterate obstinacy; and if his calls and invitations, his threats and promises, his admonitions and entreaties have none of them any effect on us, we may thank ourselves for what is like to befall us hereafter, and may charge all our sufferings on our own incorrigible stubbornness and perversity.

I have now gone through the several particulars I proposed to treat of, the reflection whereon might furnish us with divers very useful inferences, which the time not allowing me to insist on at large, I shall but just propose them as very proper and suitable subjects for your private meditations.

From the long-suffering of God, then, and bearing with so many indignities and affronts before he proceeds to make us the examples of his justice, we may very naturally infer our obligation to a like deportment toward our offending brethren. This is the only condition on which we presume to ask for pardon ourselves; we desire our Heavenly Father to forgive us, but to the same degree that we forgive others: and you know what became of that hard-hearted servant, who after his Lord had freely remitted to him a very great and heavy debt, had no compassion on his fellow-servant, but caught him by the throat, required instant payment, and, notwithstanding the entreaties and promises of the other, would allow him no time, but immediately cast him into prison.

From this admirable patience and lenity of God, we may farther learn to avoid despair. Though every the least sin is in its own nature mortal, and renders us liable to eternal vengeance, and our own sins are more in number than the hairs of our head, and every one of them of a prodigious size; still let us not

sink

sink into despondency and dejection, nor give ourselves over for lost and reprobate. We have still a refuge and retreat, and so long as there is grace enough left in us to ask for pardon, there is goodness enough in God to grant it.

And as the consideration of the slowness of God's judgments may sufficiently arm us against despair, so the sureness of them may caution us against presumption; it is dangerous trespassing too far even on Divine goodness; it is extreme folly as well as inexcusable ingratitude to irritate and defy, to slight and trifle with our Almighty Judge, in confidence of his long-suffering and forbearance, and with an intended reserve of making him amends by a late repentance and submission. How uncertain these opportunities are, and how seldom embraced when offered, we very well know: and surely then no wise man will build his everlasting hopes on so sandy a foundation. It is possible indeed to work out our salvation, so long as we have the day before us, but no one knows how soon the night may overtake him, *in which no man can work.*

Let us remember the argument St. Peter uses to some who he was aware would flatter themselves, and draw some deceitful conclusions, from the delay of God's judgments: *Beloved, says he, be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.* Though we men are obliged to watch times and opportunities, which, when once slipped by, can never be recalled, yet God is limited by no time, and can accomplish his purposes as well some millions of ages hence, as at this present moment. All eternity to come is his proper season, the present minute alone is securely ours, which we may improve to our everlasting salvation.

Lastly, from this expostulation of God with sinful men, *why will ye die?* we may assuredly conclude, that we are under no absolute, irresistible decree of reprobation. What we will, we chuse; now choice implies a power of refusing, or otherwise it is no choice; and if we can indifferently either take or leave a thing, how can we be said to be absolutely and unconditionally determined to either! Would the Almighty thus reason the case with us, and demand of us why we would do a

thing which he himself had made it impossible for us not to do?

If we do die then eternally, it is because we will; he has offered us the refusal of a far better portion; and if we think fit, we may embrace it.

That we all may be so wise as to chuse the good part that cannot be taken from us, and to remember the things that belong to our peace, before they are hid from our eyes,

God of his infinite mercy grant, &c.

S E R M O N CXIV.

By JOSHUA ALLEN,

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The Nature of true Repentance.

LUKE, xiii. 3.

—Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.

FROM the words of my text I shall take occasion to shew,

- I. The nature of true repentance.
 - II. The great virtue and efficacy of it.
- And,
- III. I shall conclude with a suitable exhortation.

I. and first, of the nature of true repentance.

True repentance does, if I mistake not, contain in the notion of it these five things:

1. A deep and unfeigned sense of our guilt.
 2. A just and awful apprehension of God's displeasure.
 3. A godly sorrow and contrition of heart for having incurred and provoked it.
 4. A thorough hatred and detestation of our sins, upon this account.
- And,

5. Such a sincere and stedfast resolution of amendment as does, through God's grace, actually produce and *bring forth fruits meet for repentance.* (Matt. iii. 8.) Or, in other words, a thorough change of mind and manners; and a sincere obedience for the time to come.

1. and first. True repentance must necessarily begin with a deep and unfeigned sense of our guilt. This is the very foundation, or ground-work, of the whole

whole affair; this is the only genuine source of a true penitential godly sorrow, which *worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of.* (2 Cor. vii. 10.) No man can rightly amend his faults, without being first of all sensible of them: and therefore we do very truly say; that confession is the first step to amendment.

This deep and unfeigned sense of our guilt, and the natural consequence of it, an humble and devout acknowledgment and confession of it before God, are so essentially necessary to true repentance; that the Scriptures lay the whole stress of the matter upon these two points, as virtually including each other. For he that is deeply, and duly sensible of his guilt: does in effect condemn himself, and confess himself in the sight of God: and he that confesses his sins to God, as he ought to do; must do it with the fullest conviction, and with the most lively and affecting sense of the exceeding great heinousness and turpitude of them. And for this reason I have chosen to join these two things together: because they do mutually imply, and necessarily suppose each other: and because they are in this manner joined together in the holy Scriptures.

Thus after God had denounced a long train of woes against the children of Israel, in case of their disobedience; he says thus: *If they shall confess their iniquity, and the iniquity of their fathers, with their trespasses, which they trespassed against me, and that also they have walked contrary unto me* (Lev. xxvi. 40, 41, 42. v. 5.); *and that I also have walked contrary unto them, and have brought them into the land of their enemies: If then their uncircumcised hearts be humbled, and they then accept of the punishment of their iniquity: Then will I remember my covenant with Jacob, and also my covenant with Isaac, and also my covenant with Abraham will I remember.* (Numb. v. 6. 7.)

Here we find, that confession of sins, a deep and unfeigned sense of the guilt of them, and an humble acknowledgment of God's justice in the punishment of them; are insisted upon as the conditions, upon which alone the pardon of them is to be obtained.

Thus again, when Nathan rebuked David in the matter of Uriah; *David said unto Nathan, I have sinned against the*

Lord. (2 Sam. xii. 13.) This humble confession of his sin was accompanied with such a deep and unfeigned sense of his guilt, and such a bitter remorse, and compunction of spirit upon that account, as rendered his repentance acceptable unto God. *And Nathan said unto David, the Lord also hath put away thy sin; thou shalt not die.* And for this reason, the royal penitent, being now in a transport of joy, upon his being restored to the Divine favour, speaks thus in that song of deliverance which he composed upon this occasion. *I will acknowledge my sin unto Thee: and mine unrighteousness, have I not hid. I said, I will confess my sins unto the Lord: and so thou forgavest the wickedness of my sin.* (Psal. xxxii. 5, 6.)

And to the same purpose his son Solomon says thus: *he that covereth his sins, shall not prosper: but whose confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy.* (Prov. xxviii. 13.)

And St. John to the like effect: *If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.* (1 John, i. 9.)

From all which passages it appears, that we must beget in our minds, and imprint upon our hearts, the deepest and most unfeigned sense of our guilt; before we can repent to any purpose. The proud pharisee in the gospel; who was full of himself and his own righteousness could not possibly become better: so long as he entertained such an overweening opinion, and high conceit of himself; whilst he saw no faults in himself; he could not perceive any necessity of amendment: But so long as he continued to seem righteous in his own eyes, he must necessarily continue both to judge and to act amiss. And for this reason he was rejected of God. Whilst the poor publican, who entertained a due sense of his own vileness, and humbled himself for it in the sight of God, was graciously accepted by him.

Therefore we must endeavour to possess ourselves with a deep and affecting sense of the exceeding great depravity and odiousness of sin: the excessive obliquity and baseness of its nature; and the infinite risk and danger which attend it: and these considerations must sink deep into our hearts, and work in us the most serious and settled conviction, and persuasion of its deadly and destructive tendency.

And

And to this end, we must consider it, as the wilful violation of the most perfect rule: As the voluntary transgression of the great law of our nature: as a presumptuous contradiction, and daring opposition, to the eternal and immutable rules of the divine wisdom, and justice, and goodness: as a manifest contempt of the Divine authority, and of the revealed will of God: as a bold indignity, and open defiance to the Supreme Judge, and moral governor of the world: as the most outrageous insult to the most powerful and beneficent to the most just and holy; to the greatest, and kindest, and best of beings: as the basest return for all his wonderful kindness, and goodness, and love to us: as the most shocking abuse of his astonishing forbearance and long-suffering towards us: and above all, as the vilest and most shameful ingratitude to our heavenly Father, for his inestimable love in the redemption of the world by our Lord Jesus Christ.

This is the true light in which we ought to consider our sins. And therefore we should not only reflect within ourselves; how unlike to God our sins make us; how unworthy of his favour; how odious and abominable they render us in his sight; and how justly obnoxious to his eternal wrath and vengeance: but we should likewise consider, that every sin, which we willingly and wilfully commit, does in reality *crucify the son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame* (Heb. vi. 6.); that we do thereby profanely tread under foot the son of God, and count the blood of the covenant, *wherewith we are sanctified, an unholy thing, and do despite unto the spirit of grace* (x. 29.); by defiling and polluting his holy temple; and thereby grieving and forcing him to flee from us.

And surely, when we look upon our sins in this view, we cannot help being deeply sensible of the greatness of our guilt; and abundantly convinced of the exceeding great malignity and odiousness of sin.

The very birds of the air, the beasts of the field, and the fishes of the sea, do all of them carefully observe the laws of their nature: and do, by a regular and uniform course of existence, all of them jointly conspire to shew forth, and proclaim their Maker's praise. And, as the Psalmist speaks, *The heavens declare the*

glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handy work. (Psalm. xix. 1.)

Therefore, while the whole creation does thus, as it were, join in concert; and by its silent harmony and order, evidently set forth the praises of God: how exceedingly wicked and criminal must man be, thus to rebel against his Almighty and Beneficent Creator, and against his merciful Saviour and Redeemer: who does, notwithstanding all his ingratitude, not only uphold and support him with his hand, here in this world; but likewise intercede, and plead for him with his father; and solicit and court him, wicked as he is, to return to his duty and allegiance, by the affectionate calls, and gracious applications of the holy spirit?

If we do but look upon our sins in this light, and suffer such reflections as these to dwell long enough upon our minds, they cannot fail of exciting in us a deep and unfeigned sense of our guilt. And, as St. Cyprian observes, the greatest happiness of all is, not to sin, or offend wilfully; and the next to this is, to be duly sensible of our sins.

And the reason of this assertion is, that if this sense of our guilt is but duly attended to, it will not only effectually restrain us from returning to our former sins; but will likewise powerfully incline us to lead a new life for the time to come: and then more especially; when we add to it the second thing included in the notion of true repentance, which is,

2. A just and awful apprehension of God's displeasure.

As the foundation of repentance must necessarily be laid in a deep and unfeigned sense of the guilt of our past sins, even so must the foundation of our future obedience be necessarily placed in the fear of God, and in a just and awful apprehension and dread of his displeasure. And accordingly we find, that the obedience of our first parents was not only founded in the consideration of God's goodness to them, but likewise upon the apprehension and dread of his displeasure, in case of their disobedience. And agreeably hereunto, the fear of God is every-where, both in the Old and the New Testament, proposed to men, as one of the principal motives to obedience: and the vices and impieties of men are as constantly ascribed

ascribed to the absence and the want of this religious fear and dread.

Thus Abraham says of the inhabitants of Gerar, *Surely the fear of God is not in this place; and they will slay me for my wife's sake.* (Gen. xx. 11.) And God himself said to Abraham, when he offered up his son; *Now I know that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son from me.* (xxii. 12.) Thus Jacob is said to *swear by the fear of his father Isaac.* (xxxii. 53.) And Joseph says, *This do and live: for I fear God.* (xlii. 18.) And Moses says to the children of Israel, upon the giving of the law in mount Sinai, with the awful solemnity of an earthquake, and of thunder and lightning; *God is come to prove you, and that his fear may be before your faces, that ye sin not.* (Exod. xx. 20.) And elsewhere God himself says, *O that there were such an heart in them that they would fear me, and keep all my commandments always!* (Deut. v. 29.)

Well therefore does holy David say; *the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.* (Psal. cxi. 10.) And to the same purpose Solomon, *the fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge.* (Prov. i. 7. 9, 10.) And holy Job thus, *the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom.* (xxviii. 28.) And the prophet Isaiah says to the Jews, *sanctify the Lord of hosts himself, and let him be your fear, and let him be your dread.* (viii. 13.) And so in innumerable other passages, both of the law and the prophets.

And in the New Testament our blessed Saviour directs his disciples, to *fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.* (Matt. x. 28.) And in the like manner his apostles direct their converts to *fear God* (1 Pet. ii. 17.); to *perfect holiness in the fear of God* (2 Cor. vii. 1.); and to *work out their salvation with fear and trembling* (Phil. ii. 12.); and to *serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear* (Heb. xii. 28.); and to *pass the time of their sojourning here in fear* (1 Pet. i. 17.); and so forth.

And from the whole it is easy to observe that as the fear of God is so essentially necessary, to enforce and secure our obedience to his laws, it follows from hence, that a just and awful apprehension and dread of God's displeasure must likewise necessarily be one of the princi-

pal ingredients of a sincere and true repentance.

And for this reason Tertullian does very rightly say, that where there is no fear of God; there cannot, for that reason, be any amendment; and where there is no amendment, all repentance is necessarily vain, and to no purpose.

But where men are duly sensible of their guilt, and thoroughly convinced and persuaded of the exceeding great malignity and odiousness of sin, they will naturally be led to entertain a just and awful apprehension of the dread of the divine displeasure upon this account.

When the poor guilty sinner looks carefully into his own breast, and reads over the black catalogue of his sins, and seriously considers all the heightening circumstances, and aggravations of them; when he considers the infinite dignity and majesty of that God, whom he has offended, affronted and insulted; when he reflects upon that transcendent purity and holiness, which he has shocked, grieved, and displeased; when he thinks upon that inflexible and tremendous justice, which he has incensed and provoked; and when he takes into his account, that amazing and stupendous mercy and goodness which he has so long and so shamefully despised and abused; he must needs be seized with the utmost horror and dread of the divine displeasure and indignation, which he has brought upon himself; and his heart must even melt within him, and his spirit faint, and his knees smite together, like the impious Belshazzar, when he saw the hand-writing upon the wall against him.

When he considers: that he has forfeited and lost the favour and friendship of the greatest and best of Beings; that he has by his sins crucified afresh the Lord of glory, and even made his Saviour and Redeemer to become his enemy; and that he has grieved and vexed the holy spirit of God, and forced him to depart from him, he must needs be filled with remorse and anguish; and when he considers farther, that dreadful penalty which he has incurred by his sins; when he looks forward into the next world, with horror and dread; when he sees over his head an offended and angry God almost

almost ready to pronounce sentence, and to execute vengeance upon him; and below, hell gaping to receive him, and *moving herself at his coming*: whilst he is thus distressed, and perplexed; and walks over the frightful precipice of eternity, trembling every step he goes; and fearing every minute, lest he should fall into this bottomless pit of destruction and perdition: whilst *the terrors of God do thus set themselves in array against him* (Job. vi. 4.), he must needs be overwhelmed, and confounded with the consciousness of his guilt; and be thoroughly possessed with an apprehension and dread of God's displeasure: which if not timely averted, and turned away, must soon plunge him into eternal misery and torment.

This, it must be owned, is a terrible case: but still where there is this sense and feeling left, there are notwithstanding some hopes. This is at least a favourable symptom; and a sure sign and indication, that the part affected is not as yet quite mortified: but, that it may still, provided only that due care be taken, and no time lost, be by degrees restored to its former strength and soundness.

For although the denunciations of God's wrath, against obdurate and impenitent sinners, be indeed exceedingly severe and terrible; yet there is, thanks be to God for his wonderful love and mercy to us in Christ, this comfort and consolation left, that the gospel affords all possible encouragement to sincere penitents, to come unto God, by faith in Christ; who has graciously invited all such as are weary, and *heavy laden* (Matt. xi. 28.), with the burden of their sins, to come unto him by faith and repentance: and *he will give them rest* unto their souls.

If therefore, to the sense of his guilt, and to an awful apprehension and dread of God's displeasure, the *humble* penitent does but add, in the third place,

3. A godly sorrow and contrition of heart, for having incurred and provoked it; he does, at least so far, repent sincerely, and as he ought to do.

And indeed when he is once duly convinced of the exceeding great malignity and heinousness of sin; and is, in consequence hereof, filled with a just and awful apprehension and dread of the Divine displeasure, upon this account, he must needs be pierced with the most lively sor-

row; and feel the bitterest remorse, and anguish of soul, for his past sins. When he considers, how grievously he has provoked the Majesty of Heaven; what ungrateful returns he has made to God, for all his wonderful love and goodness towards him; how he has *crucified* the Blessed Jesus afresh by his sins: and *grieved the holy spirit of God*: when he considers that terrible condition into which his sins have brought him, and that dreadful punishment which hangs over his head: I say, when he considers all this seriously, he will, with the Psalmist, not only *confess his wickedness*, but he will likewise be truly *sorry for his sin*. (Psa. xxxviii. 18.) And according as his sins have been either more or less in number, or more or less grievous in their nature; or else continued in either a longer or a shorter time; even so will his sorrow, and grief for them, be either greater or less in proportion.

Thus we find, that St. Peter, who had denied his master, and that with the dreadful aggravation of profane cursing and swearing, *went out, and wept bitterly*. (Matt. xxvi. 75.) The Apostle was sensible, that so great a crime as his was, called for floods of tears to wash away the guilt of it. And therefore he *went out* to seek a proper place; where he might indulge his grief, and give full vent to his sorrow. His concern for his sin was too great to be confined; too much to be expressed by a sigh, or a groan, or a sorrowful countenance: And therefore he sought a place, where he might pour forth his soul freely unto God, and *show him of his trouble* (Psa. cxlii. 2.); and where he might, by *strong crying and tears*, earnestly implore the pardon of his sins, and humbly deprecate the wrath of God; and devoutly sue, to be restored to favour.

If therefore we would repent, as we ought to do; our sorrow, and our grief must keep pace with our guilt; and the former must be as great, and as lasting, as the latter is heinous, and provoking. If our sins have been great and manifold, our sorrow for them must be great in proportion, and lasting in duration. For great and heinous offences, confirmed habits of sin, and a long course of impiety and irreligion, do necessarily require, a deep and sincere humiliation of the soul before God; and a long, and lasting sor-

row for them : and although we pray, and hope, and believe, and are assured, that God will freely and graciously pardon all our sins, for the sake of Christ, upon our sincere repentance and amendment ; yet we must take especial care, that we do not too easily forgive ourselves. And although our Heavenly Father is merciful, and gracious ; and always ready, and willing, to forgive those that truly repent : yet we must be sure to abase and *humble ourselves under the mighty hand of God* (1 Pet. v. 6.), and to take shame unto ourselves ; saying, in the words of the prophet, *O Lord, righteousness belongeth unto thee, but unto us confusion of faces.* (Dan. ix. 7.)

And if we would *sorrow after a godly manner* (2 Cor. vii. 9), our sorrow must not proceed only from a sense of the danger we are in, but from a sincere love of God, and a sense of his wonderful goodness and love to us.

There is indeed a sorrow, which proceeds only from an apprehension of the imminent danger, to which our sins have unhappily exposed us. But alas ! this is no more than a small *vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away.* (James, iv. 14.) A man that lives under the influence of vicious habits ; may, it is possible, at the seeming approach of death ; or when *the hand of God is heavy upon him* (Job, xxxiii. 7.), appear to be truly penitent for his sins : he may express a great concern for his past behaviour ; and promise solemnly to to live better, and to become quite a new man ; if he can but escape this sickness, or this calamity : but, at best, this is no more than the natural workings of self-preservation. It is natural for all men to desire happiness ; although they are often mistaken in the use of the means, which are necessary in order to procure it : and it is likewise equally natural, to shun and fly from every thing which has the air and appearance of misery. Therefore, when men start, and shrink back, at the seeming approach of death ; and shew an abhorrence for those courses which have brought them almost to the very brink of destruction ; they only do what nature itself prompts them to, and what they cannot possibly avoid. For who is that man, who would not run out of an house, that was all on fire about his ears,

or just ready to fall on his head ? Therefore it is very greatly to be feared, that if the danger were but once removed, such persons would, soon after that, harden their hearts, as *Pharaoh* formerly did ; and return to their old sins, like *the dog to his vomit*, and like *the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire.* (2 Pet. ii. 22.)

Nothing is more common than to see men, upon the bed of sickness, greatly bewailing and lamenting the folly and wickedness of their past lives ; and full of resolutions to lead a new life, if they can but get over this sickness ; and if God will be but pleased, to restore them again to their former health. If God would but graciously do this, how thankful, and how good would they be ? But how much soever in earnest they may seem for the time ; 'tis sorely against the grain, and only because they cannot help it. For as soon as ever the danger is past, they do, like the frightened mariner, when the tempest is over, soon forget all their good resolutions, and solemn vows ; and instead of being the better for them, they do on the contrary become more hardened, and rather *strengthen themselves* in their wickedness : Not considering, and *not knowing that the goodness of God* (Rom. ii. 4.) ought rather to lead them to repentance ; than to encourage them to continue in their sins.

This sorrow therefore, as it is naturally of such a short continuance, cannot possibly produce any good effects : And, for this reason, cannot possibly be acceptable in the sight of God. This is that *sorrow of the world*, which, as the apostle says, *worketh death.* But a true *godly sorrow*, which *worketh repentance to salvation, not to be repented of* (2 Cor. vii. 20.), must proceed from a deep and unfeigned sense of our guilt, and a just and awful apprehension, and dread of the Divine displeasure. It must not only arise from a sense of our danger, but it must likewise have a respect unto God ; to the honour and authority of his laws ; and to the passion and death of our Blessed Saviour, which our sins were partly the cause of : and also to the glory of his name, and the interests of his religion, which have been so grossly injured and hurt by our sins. And therefore it must be such a sorrow as *rents our hearts, and tears them away*

away from their beloved sins, such a godly sorrow and contrition of heart, as begets in us,

4. A thorough hatred and detestation of our sins, which is the next thing naturally included in the proper notion of true repentance.

Then only can we be truly said to repent, when our sins become as odious, and displeasing to us, as they were once agreeable and pleasing; when our opinions and sentiments of them are perfectly different from what they were before; when we hate and abhor those practices which once we looked upon with complacency and satisfaction; and when the remembrance of them serves only to work us up to a holy indignation and displeasure against them, and against ourselves, for having once been guilty of them.

This is that godly sorrow, and pious resentment for our past sins, which St. Paul describes in these words: *For behold this self-same thing, that ye sorrowed after a godly sort, what carefulness it wrought in you, yea, what clearing of yourselves, yea, what indignation, yea, what fear, yea, what vehement desire, yea, what zeal, yea, what revenge?* (ver 11.)

If we are but truly and deeply sensible of the great malignity and heinousness of our past sins, and justly apprehensive of God's displeasure for them, and if we are likewise heartily sorry for having offended him, we cannot choose but have an abhorrence and aversion for those sins, which have separated between us and our God, which have set us at such a distance from our heavenly Father, and made us incur his displeasure and indignation. If we have a true regard for God and religion, we must naturally hate all such practices as are displeasing to him, and injurious to his honour and glory. And if we would be thoroughly reconciled to him, and fully re-instated in his favour, we must love every thing that God loves, and hate every thing that God hates; and consequently, we must hate and abhor our sins from our very hearts: because, without this, God cannot be reconciled unto us; neither can we possibly be qualified for his favour.

For unless we do from our hearts detest and abhor them, we cannot possibly leave and forsake them. No man ever yet willingly left and forsook that which he continued to love, and to doat upon. So

long as we retain any degree of liking for them, we shall be too much inclined to return unto them. So that you see, before we can possibly forsake our sins and amend our lives, we must sincerely hate and abhor them.

And surely, when we reflect duly upon the excessive turpitude and odiousness of sin, and the dreadful consequences to which it exposes us, and what a terrible and fearful thing it is to fall into the hands of the living God; (Heb. x. 31.) it is impossible, but we must sincerely detest and abhor those sins which have rendered us obnoxious to his displeasure, and to all the severe effects of his wrathful indignation. Therefore, if we do but seriously consider the fatal tendency of sin, and the deadly and destructive nature of it, we must needs conceive the most unfeigned aversion and abhorrence for all such ways as lead down to death and damnation. And, for this reason, we shall be naturally inclined to complete and perfect our repentance,

5. By forming such a sincere and steadfast resolution of amendment as will, through God's grace seconding our earnest and faithful endeavours, actually produce and bring forth fruits meet for repentance.

This resolution is the necessary result of the foregoing branches of true repentance. For, whoever is duly sensible of his guilt, justly apprehensive of God's displeasure, and heartily sorry for having incurred and provoked it, and does, in consequence hereof, hate and abhor his past sins, upon this account, must necessarily form such a sincere and steadfast resolution of amendment, as will probably, through God's grace upon his endeavours, actually bring forth fruits meet for repentance.

No man, that thinks at all, can possibly be reconciled to the dreadful thought of his being finally and eternally miserable: and, for this reason, every sinner that seriously bethinks himself of the fatal tendency of his sinful ways, if he proceeds only so far as we have hitherto gone in the consideration of this subject, and if he passes regularly and carefully through all the several stages before-mentioned, he must necessarily, in the last place, firmly and steadfastly resolve upon a new course of life for the time to come. He can never think of going

on in the same way as he did before, contrary to the impartial judgment of his own mind, the clearest and most forcible conviction of his understanding, the strong and powerful remonstrances of his conscience, the express commands of God in scripture, and the awful and interesting motives of the gospel; and this, at the expence of all his ease and quiet here in this world, and with the infinite risque and hazard of his eternal salvation in the next. But, on the contrary, whilst his poor, wounded soul, is thus brimful of the sense of his guilt, with the apprehension and dread of God's displeasure, and even overflows with tears, and other expressions of sorrow, upon both these accounts, and does most sincerely hate and detest its former sins, he must necessarily form a sincere and stedfast resolution of amendment for the time to come. He will naturally say, with the prodigal in the gospel, *I will arise, and go to my father, and will say unto him, father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son;* (Luke, xv. 18, 19.) and he will likewise firmly resolve to be dutiful and obedient for the time to come.

This is what every sincere penitent does, and must do, if he hopes that his repentance will be accepted of God. Therefore, a faint resolution of amendment will by no means serve our turn: but we must resolve in good earnest to break off our sins, and never more to return unto them again: and we must be sure to put our resolutions into practice, and to *bring forth fruits meet for repentance*; that so our repentance may never need to be repented of. (2 Cor. vii. 10.)

Unless we do this, it is all lost labour; all the rest will go for nothing, and be of no account in the sight of God. For, as the wise son of Sirach says, *he that washeth himself after the touching of a dead body, if he touch it again, what availeth his washing?* So is it with a man that fasteth for his sins, and goeth again, and doth the same: *who will hear his prayer? or what doth his humbling profit him?* (Ecclus. xxxiv. 25, 26.)

For which reason, our resolution of amendment must be sincere and stedfast; it must be such as will stand the shock of a violent temptation; such as may, by the help of God's grace, be able to withstand the furious assaults of the world,

the flesh, and the devil. We must beforehand expect to have the sincerity of our resolution brought to the test. Well, therefore, did the son of Sirach advise, *my son, if thou come to serve the Lord, prepare thy soul for temptation.* (Ecclus. ii. 4.) We ought then to prepare ourselves accordingly, and to *put on the whole armour of God*; (Eph. vi. 11.) that so we may be able to *stand against the wiles of the devil; and having done all to stand*; (ver. 13.) And that our endeavours may prove effectual, we must pray to God to assist and to strengthen us; that so his grace may be *sufficient for us*, and his strength made *perfect in our weakness*. (2 Cor. xii. 9.) And, when we are actually under circumstances of temptation, we must look up stedfastly unto heaven with the eye of faith; we must call to mind all the promises and threatenings of the gospel, all the glories and the joys of heaven, and all the miseries and the torments of hell. And, for our farther encouragement to persevere in our duty, let us set before us the glorious examples of those noble worthies who have gone before us in the same paths of virtue and goodness; of those many saints, martyrs, and confessors who have, before us, *fought the same good fight, who have finished their course, and kept the faith*; (2 Tim. iv. 7.) and who are now entered upon the reward of their faithful services here in this world.

If we are, in this manner, enabled to resist and overcome temptations, and to conquer and subdue our sins; and if we do, by a regular and uniform course of obedience to all God's laws, without exception or reserve, manifest the sincerity and firmness of our resolution; if we do, upon all occasions, *bring forth fruits meet for repentance*, and shew forth the praises of God in our lives and conversations; then is our repentance sincere, and acceptable in the sight of God; for the sake, and through the merits and mediation, of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

And this brings me, in the second place,

II. To shew the great power and efficacy of true repentance.

But, having already trespassed too long upon your patience, this must be left to the next opportunity.

Now, to God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost, be ascribed,

cribed, as is due, all honour, praise, might, majesty, and dominion, now and ever-more. Amen.

S E R M O N CXV.

The Power and Efficacy of true Repentance.

LUKE, xiii. 3.

—Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.

IN my last discourse on these words, I proposed,

I. To shew the nature of true repentance.

II. The great power and efficacy of it.

And, III. To conclude all with a suitable exhortation.

The first of these heads I have already spoken to;

And I come now,

II. To shew the great power and efficacy of true repentance.

When I speak of the power and efficacy of true repentance, I do not mean, that it has in itself any degree of causality or efficiency in the affair of our justification with God. True repentance, which always includes amendment of life, may in some sort serve to indemnify our future conduct; but it can in no ways and by no means atone for and expiate the guilt of our past sins. And therefore, as we have it not in our power to make satisfaction to the divine justice, for the corruption of our nature, and the sins of our lives, and as we are, by reason of the great frailty and infirmity of our present state, utterly incapable of a perfect and unflinching obedience; therefore, I say, God has in great mercy and love, and in great pity and compassion to our present weakness, graciously condescended to provide this satisfaction himself, and to admit us into a second covenant, upon such terms as are suited to the present condition of our nature, and that degree of strength which we now enjoy. Thus it is that we are justified freely by God's grace, through the redemption that is in Jesus Christ; whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation, through faith in his blood. (Rom. iii. 24, 25.)

These terms are, as St Paul expresses it, repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ. (Acts, xx. 21.) Or else, such a faith in the merits of

Christ, and such a belief of the doctrines which he delivered, as does, by the operation of God's spirit upon our hearts, actually produce in us sincere repentance for our past sins, and unfeigned obedience for the time to come.

There is now, under the gospel, an inseparable connexion established between faith and repentance, on the one hand, and the remission of sins and eternal life, on the other. And although repentance be frequently spoken of by itself, as a thing that will entitle us to pardon and salvation, yet it must always be understood to be such a repentance as is founded upon gospel motives, and actually proceeds from faith in Christ; which is the only thing that can make it acceptable in the sight of God.

Thus John the Baptist preached repentance, because *the kingdom of heaven was at hand.* (Matt. iii. 2.) The belief of the near approach of this kingdom was the great motive upon which their repentance was grounded: and they who believed it to be actually at hand, were, in testimony of their belief, *baptised of him in Jordan, confessing their sins.* (ver. 6.) From whence it appears, that it was their faith which gave a sort of merit to their repentance, and rendered it available for the remission of sins, as St. Luke speaks; (iii. 3.) And, for this reason, St. Paul says, *John verily baptised with the baptism of repentance, saying unto the people, that they should believe on him which should come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus.* (Acts, xix. 4.)

And to the same purpose our blessed Saviour in these words, *Now after that John was put into prison, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, and saying, the time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel.* (Mark, i. 14, 15.)

And, as our blessed Lord joined faith and repentance together in this manner, even so likewise has he joined together, and that inseparably, repentance and remission of sins in his name, in that commission which he gave to his apostles, after his resurrection, in these words: *And he said unto them, thus it is written, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day: and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name, among all nations.* (Luke, xxiv. 46, 47.)

And agreeably hereunto, when St. Peter opened this commission on the day of Pentecost, and preached unto the Jews *that same Jesus, whom they had taken, and by wicked hands had crucified and slain*; the historian tells us, that, *when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter, and to the rest of the apostles, men and brethren, what shall we do?* (Acts, ii. 23. ver. 37.) Their consciences, now awakened and alarmed, severely upbraided them with the horrid guilt they had contracted, by wilfully crucifying the Lord of Glory; and the sense of their guilt was so very tormenting and insupportable, that it almost drove them to despair and madness. And surely, if ever there was need of a healing balm to be poured into the deadly wounds of a guilty conscience, these men, of all others that ever lived, or ever shall live, stood most in need of such a sovereign remedy. And yet, dangerous and desperate as their condition was, and seemingly without hope, as they themselves thought it, when, in a fit of wild despair, they uttered these melancholy words, *what shall we do?* yet their case was not utterly past cure. For the things that are impossible with men, are possible with God. (Mark, x. 27.) As Daniel says, *to the Lord our God belong mercies and forgivenesses, though we have rebelled against him.* (ix. 9.) He is a God ready to pardon, gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness. (Nehem. ix. 17.) God himself graciously declared unto Moses his great readiness to pardon and forgive sins upon repentance, when he passed by before him and proclaimed, *the Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin.* (Exod. xxxiv. 6, 7.)

And for this reason, although the sin of those wretches who crucified our Saviour was exceeding great, great indeed beyond expression, yet it was not too great for God to forgive, for the sake of Christ. The infinite merit of his passion and death was sufficient to outweigh all the guilt of the whole world. The precious blood of his dear son, Jesus Christ, (1 John, i. 7.) was abundantly sufficient to cleanse them and the whole world, from all the guilt of all their sins. Nay, our blessed Saviour himself parti-

cularly designed, and earnestly desired, that these very wretches themselves should fully partake of the benefits of his death, if they would but seek earnestly for it, by exercising true repentance towards God, and an humble faith and trust in him. And to this end he did, even in his last agony on the cross, pray for his crucifiers in these words: *Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.* (Luke, xxiii. 34.) And for this reason St. Peter perfectly well knowing the mind and disposition of his master, and the nature of that commission which he was intrusted with, plainly declares to these repenting Jews, not only the possibility, but likewise the infallible certainty of their obtaining pardon, if they would only seek for it in that way which the blessed Jesus himself had graciously appointed: that is to say, by repentance toward God, and faith in him. Then Peter said unto them, *repent, and be baptised every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ, for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.* (Acts, ii. 38.)

In this manner were all their sins to be freely and fully pardoned for the sake of Christ: and accordingly the historian tells us, that all they that gladly received his word were baptised; and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls; (ver. 41.)

So effectual was the earnest intercession of our kind and merciful Saviour in the behalf of his greatest enemies!

Therefore, if these sinners against their own souls were freely pardoned for the sake of Christ, upon their repentance, and their faith in him, let no man that sincerely repents, and amends his life, ever despair of being pardoned by God, although his sins be never so many, and never so grievous, and never so long continued in. God always knows how to pardon, if we do but turn unto him with all our hearts, and come unto him by faith in Christ. Our Lord himself has declared as much in these words, *him that cometh to me, will I in no wise cast out.* (John, vi. 37.)

And to assure us of the truth of this, it was that our Lord delivered the parable of the lost sheep; in the conclusion of which he declares, that *joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance.* (Luke, xv. 7.)

And,

And, as if this were not sufficient to encourage returning sinners to come unto God, by faith and repentance, he invites them still farther by the parable of the piece of silver; and assures them a second time, that *there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth*; (ver. 10.)

But, as if a doctrine of this importance could never be too much inculcated, and too powerfully recommended, our Lord does, in the parable of the prodigal son, clearly set forth, and that in the most pathetic and affecting manner, God's great readiness to receive and to pardon returning sinners. Therein God is, under the character of the father, represented as melting into compassion and forgiveness, upon the first discovery of his son's return. For, *when the son was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him*; (ver. 20.) And even before the poor prodigal could possibly confess his fault, and sue for pardon, the tender father had already sealed it, and buried all that was past in oblivion. And when the son nevertheless still proceeded to confess his fault, and express his concern for what was past, his father, as it were, desirous to spare him that confusion of face which was unavoidable to a person of an ingenuous temper in his circumstances, seems, as it were, unwilling even to hear his confession, and as if he had rather let the whole matter pass over in silence. His son was now sensible of his fault, and returned to his duty; and the good father desired no more. And therefore, to convince his son in the strongest manner that he heartily forgave him all that was past, he *said to his servants, (ver. 22, 23, 24.) as if he thought nothing too good for him, and no expressions and marks of his love and of his joy, upon such an occasion, too great and too many, bring forth the best robe and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet. And bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it; and let us eat and be merry. For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.*

And, if we consider the occasion upon which these parables were delivered, we shall be still farther convinced of God's great readiness to pardon all returning sinners. For the Evangelist tells us, that it was upon one of those occasions when

the publicans and sinners drew near unto him for to hear him; (ver. 1.) Upon which *the pharisees and scribes murmured at him, saying, this man receiveth sinners and eateth with them*; (ver. 2.) Upon this our Lord delivered those three parables above mentioned. *They thought wickedly, that God was even such an one as themselves*; (Psa. l. 21.) intolerably rigid, severe, and inexorable: but our blessed Saviour *reproved them, and set before them the great folly and wickedness of their judgment*; by shewing them, that *when ever the wicked forsakes his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and returns unto the Lord, he will have mercy upon him, and abundantly pardon him.* (Isai. lv. 7.) By this our Lord plainly shewed them, that *God's thoughts were not their thoughts, neither his ways their ways. For, as the heavens are higher than the earth, so were his ways higher than their ways, and his thoughts than their thoughts*; (ver. 8, 9.)

The prophet Isaiah had foretold of the Messiah, that *he should not bruise the broken reed, nor quench the smoking flax*; (xlii. 3.) but that he should, on the contrary, *bind up the broken hearted*, (lxi. 1.) and *comfort all that mourn*; (ver. 2.) and that he should *revive the spirit of the humble, and revive the heart of the contrite ones*; (lvii. 15.)

And accordingly our Lord gave them to understand, as he expressly declared upon another occasion, that he came on purpose *to seek and to save that which was lost*. (Luke, xix. 10.) And in like manner we find, in the Acts of the Apostles, that the chief substance of their preaching every where, (as St. Paul expressly declares his own doctrine to have been,) was in short no more than this, namely, *repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ*. (Acts, xx. 21. iii. 19, 20. xiii. 38, 39. xvii. 30. xxi. 16.)

And every where in the Old Testament, there is the greatest encouragement given to penitent sinners, as appears plainly in the case of David, of Ahab, of the people of Nineveh; but more particularly still in the whole body of the Jewish nation; who, although they were often *led into captivity for their sins, yet as often as ever they returned again unto the Lord their God, and sought him, and obeyed his voice, according to all that he commanded them, then the Lord their God turned their captivity, and had compassion*

upon them, and returned and gathered them from all the nations whither the Lord their God had scattered them. (Deut. xxx. 2, 3.)

And again, by the mouth of the prophet Ezekiel, God does expressly declare, that when the wicked man turneth away from his wickedness that he hath committed, and doth that which is lawful and right, he shall save his soul alive. Because he considereth, and turneth away from all his transgressions that he hath committed, he shall surely live, he shall not die; (xviii. 27, 28.)

And as if our gracious God could not give too great encouragement to repentance, and too strong assurances of his readiness to pardon, he says thus, by the same prophet, *As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live;* (xxxiii. 11.)

Neither was it under the law only that God discovered a readiness to forgive those, upon their repentance, who had broken his covenant; for, although most of those invitations to repentance, which we meet with in the New Testament, are indeed to be understood of the first conversion of men to christianity, yet it must be granted, that even those who had been so unhappy as to fall into great and crying sins, after their baptism, were still invited and exhorted to repent of their sins, and had all possible encouragement given them so to do.

This is abundantly plain and clear from the case of the incestuous Corinthian, who was delivered unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit might be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus. (1 Cor. v. 5.) It appears likewise from the case of those other Corinthian converts, who had profaned and abused the holy ordinance of the Lord's Supper, and who are expressly said to have been punished with sickness and death here in this world, that so they might be saved in that which is to come. *But, when we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world.* (1 Cor. xi. 32.)

This appears still farther from the message sent by St. John to the seven churches of Asia; who are exhorted to *repent, and do the first works;* (Rev. ii. 3.) and that under this express penalty of having their candlesticks, that is, the light

of the gospel, removed from among them.

It is not to be conceived, that God's mercies should be more straitened and confined, under the gospel, than they were under the law of Moses. But as the christian œconomy is, from first to last, a dispensation of mercy, they must be rather increased and enlarged. God is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever. (Heb. xiii. 8.) He is the Lord, he changes not: (Mal. iii. 6.) therefore alone it is that we are not consumed in our iniquities, but have time and opportunity graciously afforded us to repent of our sins, and to return unto our duty.

And accordingly the earliest fathers of the christian church speak, in very high terms, of the great power and efficacy of repentance, under the gospel.

St. Barnabas, the companion of St. Paul's travels, says, that, when our blessed Saviour was about to send out apostles to preach the gospel, he made choice of those who were wicked beyond comparison; that so he might make it appear to all the world, that he did not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.

And St. Clement, bishop of Rome, says thus, in his first epistle to the Corinthians: Let us look stedfastly to the blood of Christ, and consider how precious it is in the sight of God. For this blood which was shed, in order to our salvation, has purchased the grace of repentance to all the world. Let us look back to the generations of old, and we shall find that, in every age of the world, the Lord has graciously allowed place for repentance to all those that were willing to turn unto him. Noah preached repentance, and all that obeyed the call were saved. Jonah threatened destruction to the Ninevites; but when they repented of their sins, and addressed God, by prayer, he was appeased; and although they were before strangers to the true God, yet were they made partakers of his salvation.

And the same holy person, in his second epistle to the Corinthians, says thus: Let us repent, as long as we continue here, in this world; for we are as clay in the hands of the artificer; for as the potter fashions any vessel a new which happens to be misshapen or broken in the making, but never attempts to rectify any blemish in it after it is once put into the

the kiln to be burned; even so, and in like manner, let us, so long as we are suffered to continue in this world, truly, and from our hearts, repent of those sins we have been guilty of, that so we may obtain pardon of the Lord whilst there is time left us for repentance; because, after we are gone out of this world, we shall not be any longer able either to confess, or to repent of our sins.

And St. Hermas, (Rom. xvi. 14.) who is thought by some to have been the least favourable of any of the fathers to repentance for sins committed after baptism, does yet say some very remarkable things in favour of true repentance: for, representing the church of Christ under the notion of a tower that was building, in which the members of Christ's church are considered as so many spiritual stones of which this building was to consist, he takes notice of a heap of stones, which lay by themselves not far off from the building, which, he says, would be very useful for the work, provided only that they repented sincerely, and betimes, before the building of the tower was completed; or at least, that if they could not be admitted into this building, they might be admitted into some other place far inferior to this.

And the blessed martyr St. Ignatius, bishop of Antioch, who was a disciple of St. John, and had himself seen our blessed Saviour after his resurrection, says thus: The Lord forgives all those that repent, provided that they believe likewise in the unity of the Godhead, and hold communion with the bishop; whom he always speaks of, in all his epistles, excepting that to the Romans, as being of an order distinct from, and superior to, that of the presbyters.

And the learned Origen, who flourished near the middle of the third century, says; that all men who, by reason of their sinful nature, *labour, and are heavy laden* with the burden of their sins, are invited by the Son of God, and called to his spiritual rest; because God hath now *sent his word*, that is, his Son, *and healed them; and they are saved from their destruction*; (Psa. cvii. 20.) that is, they are now, by him, delivered from the corruption of their sinful nature, and from all the unhappy effects of it. For, says he, when a sinner is deeply sensible

of his sins, and is hereby stirred up to repentance, and when he humbles himself for his sins in the sight of God, then is he more acceptable in God's sight than him who appears less sinful in the eyes of men, and who is so far from looking upon himself as a sinful person, that he is, on the contrary, puffed up with the vain conceit of his own goodness. And then he proceeds to confirm this assertion, by the instance of the proud pharisee and the poor publican.

And St. Cyprian, about the middle of the same century, says thus: When we are once gone out of this world, there is no longer any place left for repentance, no room for humiliation, nor any benefit from it. Here alone can eternal life be either secured or forfeited; here only can we provide for it by a lively faith, and the fruits of it, the true worship and service of God. Nor let any one be discouraged, by the heinousness of his sins, or his great age, from endeavouring to obtain it. For true repentance can never be too late, whilst we continue in this world. The door of mercy is always open to those that seek it; and there is free access to all those that believe and rely on the truth of God's promises. And although it be in the very close of life, do you confess your sins to the one only true God, and with faith implore the pardon of your sins. For pardon is always granted to him that confesseth his sins in a proper manner, and believeth in the promises of the gospel; whereby you may pass through the gates of death to immortal life. This privilege has Christ purchased for us; and, in his great mercy, conferred upon us; by means of his triumphing over death, by his cross; by redeeming every one that believeth on him, with the price of his blood; by reconciling him thereby to God the Father; and by renewing him to a spiritual life, through the spirit of God, at his baptism.

Now although it must be granted, that St. Cyprian is here speaking of our first conversion to Christ at our baptism, yet we may safely collect from hence, that true repentance will always recommend us to God's mercy in Christ, who will never cast off any that turn to him with all their hearts.

For the same holy martyr, in his discourse concerning those who had fallen

away in the time of persecution, and renounced, and even blasphemed, their Lord and Saviour, addresses those very apostates in these very affectionate and pathetic terms: I beseech you, my brethren, to submit yourselves to wholesome counsels, and to salutary remedies; to join your tears with our tears, and your groans with our groans. We ourselves become supplicants to you; that so we may be able to supplicate and entreat God in your behalf; that so he may have pity on you, and pardon your sins. We beseech you to complete and to perfect your repentance, and to testify your sorrow for your past sins, by suitable marks and expressions of grief. And then, after giving them some farther directions for their conduct, he gives them this encouragement in the conclusion of his discourse: Whosoever shall humble himself in this manner, before God, for his past sins, whosoever shall, by his repentance and shame for his offence, and by his grief for his apostacy, be stirred up to a higher pitch of virtue, and a greater degree of faith; such an one, I say, being now graciously heard by God, and strengthened and assisted by him, shall now make the church rejoice on his account, which was before made sorrowful by him, and he shall not only obtain pardon for his past sins, but shall likewise have a crown of glory.

And again, in another place, commenting on these words of our Saviour, in a discourse on the virtue of charity; *but rather give alms of such things as you have*: (Luke, xi. 41.) *And behold, all things are clean unto you*: (Isai. lviii. 7, 8, &c. Dan. iv. 27.) He says, our Lord meant hereby to shew us, by what methods we might be purged and cleansed from our sins; namely, by works of charity and mercy. Our merciful Lord, says he, teaches and advises us to exercise charity to our fellow-creatures: and because he is desirous to save those whom he has redeemed with the great price of his own blood, he teaches us how we may be cleansed again from the guilt of those sins with which we have been defiled after baptism.

And the christian Cicero, Lactantius, who flourished in the beginning of the fourth century, says, God desires greatly that all men should be purified and cleansed from their sins: and therefore, he com-

mands all men every-where to repent. (Acts, xvii. 30.) Let no man, says he, be disheartened, or despair of his condition, when he is overcome of his appetites and his lusts, when he is either captivated by the deceitfulness of sin, or born down by the violence of temptations, and in consequence hereof falls into sin. Because, he may still be delivered from this spiritual bondage, and be again happily brought back to the right way, if he repents truly of his past sins, and leads a new life for the time to come; and does thereby, in some sort, make amends for the wickedness of his former life.—For, if we believe our own children to be reformed when we observe them to repent of their past miscarriages, and if we receive them again to favour, and even cherish and embrace them, whom we had before cast off and abandoned, why should we despair of the infinite clemency and mercy of our heavenly Father, when we repent, and turn unto him with all our hearts? Because our merciful Lord and Father has graciously promised to forgive the sins of all those that truly repent, and to blot out and to forget all the iniquities of all those who lead a new life for the time to come.

Since then it appears, both from the law and from the prophets, and as well from the Old Testament as from the New, and likewise from the earliest fathers of the christian church, that God is always ready and willing to pardon all sincere penitents, and to receive them again to mercy and to favour, let not the number of our sins and the greatness of our guilt tempt any of us to despair of that mercy of God, which is *over all his works.* (Psa. cxlv. 9.) For he is *good and gracious, and of great mercy unto all that call upon him*; (lxxxvi. 5.) He is *full of compassion and mercy; long-suffering, plenteous in goodness and truth*; (ver 15.) *For, look how high the heaven is in comparison of the earth: so great is his mercy also toward them that fear him.* (ciii. 11.)

If therefore we do but truly and sincerely repent us of our past sins, and lead a new life for the time to come, we have no room to doubt of God's readiness to pardon and forgive us. All the doubt and all the difficulty lies on our sides; but God is always unchangeably the same. Thus he speaks, by the prophet Malachi,

Malachi, *I am the Lord, I change not: therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed;* (iii. 6.) And again, *return unto me, and I will return unto you.* (ver. 7. Zech. i. 3.)

God is as much disposed to pardon and forgiveness now as ever he was; and, if we repent sincerely, we shall happily experience, that he is still the same merciful and gracious God that ever he was. It is our unspeakable happiness that *he changes not*; and for this reason alone it is, that we are not all of us consumed in our iniquities.

I shall conclude this head with a very remarkable and most comfortable passage, out of St. Fulgentius, bishop of Ruspe in Africa, who has left us an excellent treatise on the subject of repentance: Let no one, says he, despair of the mercy of God, when he reflects upon the heinousness of any crime he has been guilty of; nor yet let any one presume so far upon it as to continue in sin, in hopes of it; but rather let the confidence of him that hopes for mercy lead him to true repentance, without any doubt or distrust of it, that so the humility of the penitent may not plunge him into despair; and let him so love and adore the mercy of God, as to think of his justice at the same time with a becoming awe. Let him hope, and be assured, that all his sins will be forgiven upon true repentance; but none of them pardoned, so long as he continues in them. This naturally leads me in the third and last place,

III. To conclude all with a suitable exhortation.

But the present time not admitting of this, I must beg leave to defer it to the next opportunity.

Now, to God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost, be ascribed, as is due, all honour, praise, might, majesty, and dominion, now and ever more. Amen.

S E R M O N CXVI.

An Earnest Exhortation to true Repentance.

LUKE, xiii. 3.

Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.

In my former discourses on these words, I proposed,

I. To shew the nature of true repentance.

II. The great power and efficacy of it. And, III. To conclude all with a suitable exhortation.

The two first of these heads I have already gone through;

And I come now, in the last place,

III. To shut up the whole with a suitable exhortation.

And here again I shall observe, with the author last mentioned, that we ought, above all things, to be firmly persuaded, that the Lord our God is both merciful and just. From hence it will appear, to whom it is that God forgives sins; where he forgives them, and when he forgives them. The knowledge of this will hinder us from entertaining any unworthy apprehensions of the divine nature, and likewise from delaying our repentance.

As the same holy person observes, the devil blinds some people so far as to hinder them from attending to the consideration of the divine justice, by fixing their thoughts only upon the mercy of God; by which means they neglect and delay their repentance, and vainly flatter themselves that they shall obtain remission of their sins, although they continue in them even to the end of their lives.

For which reason, we ought to imprint carefully upon our minds a deep sense of God's inflexible justice, and his unspotted holiness; which will, with the help of his grace, effectually hinder us from presuming so far upon his mercy, as to take occasion from thence to continue in our sins. *What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid: How shall we that are dead to sin live any longer therein?* (Rom. vi. 1, 2.) Therefore let us not presume to despise the riches of his goodness, and forbearance, and long suffering, because we know that the goodness of God leadeth us to repentance; (ii. 4.) Let us not dare then, after our hardness and impenitent hearts, to treasure up unto ourselves wrath against the day of wrath, and revelation of the righteous judgment of God; because he will most certainly render to every man according to his deeds; (ver. 5, 6.)

God is merciful indeed; wonderfully merciful: but then he is at the same time inflexibly just, and transcendently pure and holy, and good; and therefore, as God's mercy will at all times dispose him to pardon us upon our sincere repentance and

and amendment of life, even so will his justice and holiness at all times hinder him from pardoning our sins so long as we continue in them. Upon our repentance, he will fully pardon all our sins, and readily forgive us all that is past: but, without it, he will not and cannot possibly pardon us. For, as the prophet speaks, *he is of purer eyes than to behold evil, and cannot look on iniquity.* (Hab. i. 13.) And holy David says, *Thou art the God that hast no pleasure in wickedness; neither shall any evil dwell with thee: such as be foolish shall not stand in thy sight; for thou hatest all them that work vanity.* (Psa. v. 4, 5.) And Moses says, *All his ways are judgment: a God of truth, and without iniquity, just and right is he.* (Deut. xxxii. 4.) And Jehoshaphat says, *Let the fear of the Lord be upon you, take heed and do it; for there is no iniquity with the Lord our God, nor respect of persons, nor taking of gifts.* (2 Chron. xix. 7.) And Elihu in Job says thus, *Far be it from God that he should do wickedness, and from the Almighty that he should commit iniquity; for the work of a man shall he render unto him, and cause every man to find according to his ways; (xxxiv. 10, 11.)* And St. Paul says expressly, that *we must all appear before the judgment-seat of Christ, that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad.* (2 Cor. v. 10.) And to the same purpose, in many other places both of the Old and New Testament.

Since then God is just as well as merciful, and, for this reason, cannot possibly pardon sin without sincere repentance and amendment of life, let us not venture to put off this important business, from day to day, and from time to time; but let us seriously, and without delay, turn to the Lord with all our hearts, that so he may turn unto us, and be merciful unto us, and love us freely, when his anger is turned away from us. (Hosea, xiv. 4.)

And, therefore, let us only consider with ourselves what a terrible risk and hazard we run, in staving off and delaying this necessary duty. If we put off our repentance this year, whatever be the reason of it, the same reason will probably prevail upon us to put it off still longer the next year, and the year after that, and so on; and the longer we

live and go on in our sins, the more we shall be every day wedded to them, the faster hold they will take of us, and the less we shall be inclined and disposed to repent of and to forsake them.

If we put off our repentance now, on account of the difficulty we find in it, this difficulty will always remain; and instead of growing less, as we vainly hope, it will rather increase and grow worse: and if we do not purpose to repent till such time as we find the task less difficult, at this rate, we shall never be able to repent at all, because we shall always find some difficulties in our way. The world will always abound with temptations; we shall always find in it the same allurements and enticements to sin: *For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life,* (1 John, ii. 16.) will always remain in the world, and continue to tempt, to ensnare, and to deceive, after we are dead and gone. And therefore, if we stay till they have done tempting us, we shall never repent, because they will tempt us always; we shall always see the same bewitching objects before us; and, if we indulge and allow ourselves in the unlawful pursuit and enjoyment of them, they will always continue to have the same ascendant, and the same power and influence over us.

There cannot, therefore, be a more idle imagination than to suppose, that we shall be more disposed to repent hereafter than we are at this time. The same obstacles and the same impediments will always continue to lie in our way, unless we endeavour to remove them out of it; and, the longer it is before we set about it, the less likely we shall be to succeed in our attempt, and the less able to accomplish this great business.

Therefore, he that delays his repentance till such time as he finds the task less difficult, is like the countryman whom the Roman satyrists speak of, who, when he wanted to cross over a river, stood still for some time, in hopes that the waters would pass by him.

A great many people who are now, to appearance, hardened in their sins, did, it is probable, put off this important business from time to time; it is likely, they once promised themselves that they should be able to repent before this time, and to live as they ought to do; but, whatever they might have thought of this

this matter then, they find it as difficult to repent now as ever it was. Like the countryman above-mentioned, it is probable, they waited from time to time, till the great floods of their passions and temptations passed by them; but as these still continue to flow on, and are likely to do so, they are as wicked now as ever they were, and as far off from repentance as before. So dangerous is it to put off the great business of our repentance, and to give way to our vicious inclinations! Such is the great corruption and frailty of our nature, that we shall always be more or less inclined to close in with those temptations which come in our way. The same vicious inclinations will always remain in us, unless we endeavour to check and subdue them by mortification and true repentance: nay, if they are not kept under and got the better of, they will grow more inveterate and confirmed, till they become at last, through long indulgence, invincible and incorrigible.

How many old wretches do we see in the world who are as wicked now as they were in their youth! at least they are so in their inclinations, and retain as strong and lasting a liking for their sins as ever. Now we cannot well imagine, but that most of those miserable spectacles had once some thoughts of repentance; for it is almost impossible that any wicked persons should ever think of going out of this world without repenting; and therefore charity would incline one to believe, that those old offenders had at one time or other some distant thoughts of repentance and amendment: but the misfortune was, that they put off this evil day from time to time, and shifted it off as long as they could; till at last they lost all notions of good and evil, and dropped all thoughts of the matter.

Well, therefore, did the prophet say, *Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? Then may ye also do good, that are accustomed to do evil.* (Jer. xiii. 23.)

Thus it is when men do, by repeated acts and long habits of sin, offer violence to their consciences; till at last, by neglecting their admonitions and kind remonstrances, they silence and check those friendly monitors, insomuch that they become perfectly callous, and past feeling;

and, as the apostle speaks, even *scared with a hot iron.* (1 Tim. iv. 2.)

For this reason, if ever we mean to repent at all, we must even put on a bold resolution, one time or other; and the sooner and the more vigorously we set about it, the more likely we shall be to succeed in our endeavours.

And we ought likewise to consider farther, that, if we put off our repentance to this time and the other time, we cannot assuredly depend upon living to that time: no; not even upon living to another day. There is no time like the time present. We say so; and we act as if we thought so, when any of the affairs and interests of this world are depending. And would to God that we were all of us equally wise and prudent in the grand concern of our eternal salvation! For, in an affair of such consequence, there is no time to be lost, no room for delay, and no trusting to futurity. The time past is now quite out of our power; the time to come, may, perhaps, never be in our power; and, for this reason, the present moment is all that we can securely depend upon. We see great numbers of people suddenly cut off every year of our lives, and several of them, perhaps, when they least thought of it, and were least prepared for such a sudden stroke, and, it is possible, when they were forming some faint resolutions, and entertaining some distant thoughts of repentance and amendment.

Therefore, if we still continue to provoke God, if we *despise the riches of his goodness, and forbearance, and long-suffering, not knowing, and not considering that the goodness of God leadeth us to repentance;* (Rom. ii. 4.) I say, if we presume to do this, how can we tell how soon this may happen to be our own dreadful condition?

Let us therefore, as St. Ignatius admirably well advises, reverence and fear *the forbearance and long-suffering of God;* (1 Thess. i. 10.) that so it may not prove at last to be our condemnation: let us either fear the wrath to come; or else love and embrace that grace and mercy which is now offered us through Jesus Christ. One or other of these two things we must do, if we would be *found of him in peace, and made partakers of eternal life.*

And

And let us consider farther still, that repentance is very seldom the business of a day, or a week, or a month: no; it is very often a work of time. Repentance does not consist in a bare confession of our sins, and praying for pardon. No, my brethren, repentance is, as I have shewn you already, such a deep and unfeigned sense and acknowledgment of our guilt, and such a just and awful apprehension and dread of the divine displeasure upon this account, as produces in us a sincere and hearty sorrow and concern for having provoked and offended God, and a thorough hatred and detestation of our sins. And all this is accompanied with such a sincere and stedfast resolution of amendment, as does, through God's grace working together with us, produce and bring forth fruits meet for repentance. Or, in one word, repentance is a thorough change of temper and disposition, of mind and manners, of life and actions: but we all know, that this is such a change as is not to be brought about all at once; it is not to be effected by a sigh, or a groan, or a few tears, or a wry face. No; it is with very great difficulty that we bring ourselves to hate and abhor, to loath and detest those sins which we have loved and doated upon, and lived in for a great number of years together. Repentance is generally a work of much time and difficulty; and I am sure, of all times, the time of sickness is the most unfit for this purpose. Perhaps our distemper may be so very acute and painful, as to take off our thoughts from that and from every thing besides; we may possibly be delirious, or else stupified and insensible. The grief and concern of our relations, or, it may be, our concern for them; or else, perhaps, the adjusting and settling our worldly affairs, may distract our thoughts, and divert our attention from its proper object; whilst the great account which is to be made up between God and our own consciences may remain unsettled, and be left in the utmost disorder and confusion: or else, perhaps, we may be cut off all of a sudden, without any notice or warning at all; or, it is possible, that that grace of God may be denied us in our last moments, which we have slighted and despised all our lives.

What will then become of our late, our death-bed repentance? We shall then be forced to go out of this world with all the guilt of all our sins upon our heads, unrepented of, and unforgiven.

Good God! What a dreadful, what a heart-breaking reflection is this? What would we not then give in exchange for our souls? How will our consciences then reproach and upbraid us, for abusing the mercy and goodness of God so long as we have done? How should we wish in such a case, that we had in time given a due attention to God's word, read publicly to us, and to those affectionate, moving discourses which came to us every Sunday from the pulpit?

Tell me now, my brethren, is not this a desperate risk for any man in his senses to run? And yet such a risk as this, desperate and foolish as it is, does every man run, that puts off his repentance from day to day, from year to year, and from time to time, till there be no more time left.

But oh! my brethren, let us all take effectual care, not to be of this number. Let us, whilst it is still called to-day, set about this great business of our salvation seriously and in good earnest. Let us make it the great business of our lives to work out our salvation with fear and trembling. (Phil. ii. 12.) Let us seek the Lord while he may be found: Let us call upon him while he is near. (Isai. lv. 6, 7.) Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon him. Let us, while it is called to-day, (Heb. iii. 13.) and before our hearts are hardened through the deceitfulness of sin, repent truly of our past sins, and amend our lives; and so shall we find rest unto our souls. (Matt. xi. 29.)

Which that we may all find, may God of his infinite mercy grant, for the sake of his Son Jesus Christ:

To whom, with the Father and the Holy Ghost, be ascribed, as is due, all honour, praise, might, majesty and dominion, now and ever more. Amen.

SERMON CXVII.

The Duty of receiving the Blessed Sacrament: And the Preparation necessary to the worthy Participation thereof.

LUKE, xxii. 20.

— This do in remembrance of me.

WHEN the time was now come that the Son of man should be delivered up into the hands of wicked men to be crucified and slain, he went up to Jerusalem, as it was written of him, *as a lamb to the slaughter*; (Isai. liii. 7.) not privately, as at other times, but publicly and openly. He was now about to accomplish that great and stupendous work, namely, the redemption of lost mankind: and, being thus fully intent upon this important enterprise, he says to his disciples, *With desire, I have desired to eat this passover with you, before I suffer*. (Luke, xxii. 15.) He was about to lay down his life for them, and for us, and for all the world. And, in order that this wonderful instance of his divine love might never be forgotten, he did, at the conclusion of the Paschal supper, institute the holy ordinance of the blessed sacrament, as a lively representation of his passion and death; and he left it as his last and dying order, that his disciples, and all those who should come after them, should, by the constant use and celebration of it, keep up a perpetual memory of his precious death, until his coming again. *And he took bread, and gave thanks, and brake it, and gave unto them, saying, This is my body which is given for you: this do in remembrance of me. Likewise also the cup after supper, saying, This cup is the New Testament in my blood, which is shed for you*; (xxii. 19, 20.)

Since then our blessed Saviour has commanded us all to *do this in remembrance of him*, that is, to receive the holy sacrament, in commemoration of what he has done and suffered for us; and since we are all of us bound in conscience to obey his command to the best of our power; I shall, in treating of this subject, reduce what I have to say to the following heads:

I. I shall shew the duty and obligation of receiving the blessed sacrament; and that frequently.

II. The preparation which is necessary towards the receiving of it worthily, and as we ought to do.

III. The benefit and advantage of it, when it is received in this manner.

And, IVthly and lastly, I shall conclude all with a suitable exhortation.

I. I am to shew the duty and obligation of receiving the holy sacrament; and that frequently.

In order that this may more fully appear, it will be proper to consider the end and design of this holy institution, which was, as our Lord himself declared, to perpetuate and keep up a due sense and remembrance of those great things which he has done for us. *This do*, says he, *in remembrance of me*. As if he had said, I am now about to undergo the severest trials which I can possibly be exercised with; you yourselves have been the constant witnesses of the inveterate malice of my old enemies, the scribes and pharisees, and of all that violent opposition which I have been forced to encounter, in the prosecution of my grand design of redeeming the whole race of lost mankind; but, whatever difficulties I have hitherto met with, and how great soever my past sufferings have been; yet, alas! they do not bear the least proportion to what I am now shortly about to suffer. For I must now, not only conflict with the relentless rage of the scribes and pharisees, and the insatiable fury of a giddy and incensed populace, but I must likewise engage with the whole united strength and force of all the powers of darkness.

But this, my friends, is not all that I am going to suffer for your sakes; for, although the powers of earth and hell are now, as it were, let loose upon me, yet all this, great and formidable as it is, is very far from being the whole of what I am now about to suffer. *I have still a severer baptism to be baptised with, and how am I straitened, till it be accomplished?* (xii. 50.) I am not only forced to fight with men and devils: but, as Jacob contended and wrestled with the angel until he obtained a blessing from him, even so must I wrestle and strive together with God in prayer, this night, until I obtain pardon and blessing for all the fallen sons of Adam. I am now immediately to feel the whole weight of my Father's dreadful wrath and indignation for all the sins of a wicked and lost world; and, although your zeal and affection for me has kept you hitherto closely attached to me, yet the time is now at hand when I must

I must be deprived even of this consolation, small as it is, and when I must be left all alone, to sustain the whole shock of God's displeasure for the sins of men. You will all of you be presently scattered, every one to his own home, *like sheep having no shepherd*; and I shall then be left so abandoned and deserted, that even God himself will, for a while, seem to forsake me. I must then soon after be delivered up into the power of mine enemies, to be abused and evil entreated, to be mocked and scourged, to be crucified and slain. But all this will I readily undergo for your sakes, and for the sake of all mankind; that I may thereby turn away my Father's wrathful indignation, that I may redeem you and all the world from the guilt of your original corruption, and also from the guilt of your own personal sins; and likewise from the dominion and the power of them for the time to come: and all this, in order that I may, by this means, *reconcile you and all the world unto God, in one body by the cross*: (Eph. ii. 16.) that is, in my own person, by dying on the cross for you all.

But then, at the same time that I do so much for you, it is highly fit and proper that you likewise should do something for me; and the least, surely, that you can possibly do, in return for so much love and kindness to you, is to remember and to bear in mind what I have already suffered on your behalf, and for the sake of all mankind; and what I am now about to suffer still farther, for your and their redemption and salvation. I do therefore now leave it, as my last and dying order to you all, and to all those that shall come after you, that you do, by the constant celebration of this holy sacrament, perpetuate and keep up a continual remembrance of my sufferings and death, until the time of my second coming. By *breaking of bread*, as ye now see me do, you will, in a lively manner, represent and set forth the wounding and mangling of my body by the Jews; by praying over it, and eating of it, you will naturally be put in mind of those benefits, which are procured and purchased for the world by my death: the pouring out of the wine will naturally remind you of my blood; which is soon to be shed, and poured out for you, and for all the world; and the drinking of it

will serve to shew, that you are inwardly washed and cleansed by it: and your partaking of both will be sufficient to signify, that, as your bodies are strengthened and refreshed by the kindly sustenance of bread and wine, even so are your souls comforted and sustained by the power and efficacy of my death, and by the heavenly influences and the constant supplies of divine grace, which are, for my sake, conveyed and imparted to you, and to all christians, in the due and faithful receiving of this holy sacrament.

This then was the end and design which our Saviour had in view, when he was pleased to institute and appoint this holy ordinance of the blessed sacrament. It was appointed, as our church catechism excellently well expresses it, *for the continual remembrance of the sacrifice of the death of Christ, and of the benefits which we receive thereby*. For, as St. Paul has it, *as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come*. (1 Cor. xi. 26.)

From the very end and design of the institution, therefore, and likewise from the reason and nature of the thing, it plainly appears, that we are all of us under the strongest obligations to the frequent participation of this holy ordinance. So long as we stand in need of a Saviour, just so long are we bound to commemorate what that Saviour has done for us: so long as we want a faithful Mediator to stand up in the gap, just so long ought we to remember those inestimable blessings which are purchased for us, and secured to us, by his passion and death, and by his continual mediation and intercession for us in Heaven. But how can we expect to be the better for him, if we do not follow his directions, and obey his commands? Will the merits of this Saviour, do you think, be ever applied to those persons who will not be prevailed upon to be saved by him? Or will the despised and neglected Jesus remember those ungrateful, disobedient servants of his, when they shall appear before him, in his kingdom of glory hereafter, who would never so much as vouchsafe, in his kingdom of grace here on earth, to do so small a matter, *in remembrance of him*, as to receive the blessed sacrament of his body and blood, which was broken and shed for their sakes? What can such a neglect proceed from

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from, but a disregard for this merciful Saviour, a forgetfulness of his love and compassion for them, a base ingratitude to his memory, and a shameful disobedience to his commands? *If there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby they must be saved, (Acts, iv. 12.) but the name of Jesus Christ, what will become of those nominal christians who can, by their neglect, tread under foot the Son of God, and count the blood of the covenant, wherewith they are sanctified, an unholy thing? (Heb. x. 29.)* Who can, with so much coldness and indifference, turn their backs upon the Lord's table, when they would themselves count it a breach of good manners to slight a civil invitation from a friend or a neighbour? Who can obstinately refuse such a kind and gracious invitation, as our blessed Saviour gives us all, to come and partake of this heavenly banquet? Who can wilfully reject and profanely spurn and flout at that merciful offer of pardon and peace which is so freely made to us all in this holy sacrament?

If we can prevail upon ourselves to live in the constant neglect of this sacred ordinance, it is a certain sign that we have not as yet *so learned Christ* as we ought to do; it is a plain sign that we are either engaged in such courses as are repugnant to the genius and spirit of the gospel, that we depend too much upon the *filthy rags* of our own righteousness, and that, for this reason, we do not see the necessity and the want of a Saviour; or else, that we perplex ourselves with groundless doubts and fears about our own unworthiness.

As to the first of these; if we stay away from the sacrament, on account of our being engaged in sinful courses, we ought for the same reason to stay away from church likewise. There is nothing which renders us unfit for receiving the blessed sacrament, which does not make us altogether as unfit to tread God's courts, to appear in his more immediate presence, and to offer up our petitions to him. As Solomon says, *the sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord.* (Prov. xv. 8.) Therefore, the sacrifice of all such wicked wretches is every-where, and at all times, equally and alike an abomination to the Lord; let them offer it either in private or in public, in what part of the church and in what part of

the service they will. If they are fit to join in any one part of the christian worship, they are equally fit to join in every other part of it; and if they are absolutely unfit for one, they are equally and alike unfit for all: for God abhors dissimulation and hypocrisy, every-where, and upon all occasions; and it is altogether as odious to him in the pew as at the altar, when we say our prayers in private, and when we join in any one part of the public worship, as when we receive the blessed sacrament: and he looks as much to our hearts when we pronounce the Amen, as when we eat the bread and drink the wine. Therefore, if we are only truly sincere in our addresses, we may, with an humble confidence, go to the sacrament; but if we are not sincere, I am sure we have no business at church. If we are unfit for the former, we are equally unfit for the latter; and if God is pleased to accept us in the one, he will never reject us in the other.

If, on the other hand, we presume upon our own righteousness, then there is no occasion at all to come to church; we have no need to ask pardon for our sins, nor grace to assist us in our endeavours. But this is so far from being the case, that our Saviour tells us, we are at best but *unprofitable servants*: and St. John, that *if we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.* (2 Ep. i. 8.) We all know that we might all of us be much better than we are; and, after all our care, it is a great mercy if we are accepted at last; for we might certainly be much more exact and upright than we are; and if God should require the utmost possibility of goodness at our hands, it would be no more than what he might justly expect from us. And therefore, after all our diligence, we stand in need of all the allowances which infinite goodness can possibly make for our weakness and infirmity. But how far are the very best of us from *doing all that is commanded us*? How many slips and miscarriages, how many failures and omissions, how many vain thoughts, and foolish, irregular desires, have we all to answer for? If God were to enter into strict judgment with us, *no man living would be justified in his sight*: for, as holy Job speaks, *he chargeth his angels with folly*; (iv. 18.)

yea, the heavens are not clean in his sight. (xv. 15.) No man ever yet did, or will fulfil all righteousness, but our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

If therefore, when we have done our best, we are only unprofitable servants, and if we are all of us very far from doing all that God might, with strict justice, require of us; then tell me, all you that call yourselves, and affect to be thought by others, good moral men, whether you do not want a Saviour, a Redeemer, a Mediator, an Advocate? one that may stand up in the gap between God and you? one that may turn away his fierce anger, and screen you from the dreadful effects of his wrathful indignation? one that may, by his own merits, supply the deficiency of your imperfect services? one that may intercede with God to pardon and forgive your manifold sins and offences? one that may pour down on you the blessed influences of the Holy Ghost, to assist and enable you to discharge your duty for the time to come? If then you do want such a Saviour, you must carefully and conscientiously obey all that Saviour's commands, before you can possibly be saved by him; and, as he has commanded and strictly enjoined you to receive the blessed sacrament of his body and blood, you must, without any longer delay, shew your gratitude to his memory, and your obedience to his command, by doing this in remembrance of him.

But if we forbear coming to the sacrament, out of an apprehension of our own unworthiness, then it should be considered, that the gospel always leaves place for reconciliation with God, upon true repentance and amendment of life. Nothing can make us unworthy to receive the holy sacrament, but our resolving to continue still to be unworthy. If we repent sincerely of our past sins, and stedfastly resolve to lead a new life for the time to come, then we may safely go to the sacrament. For the blessed Jesus came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance. (Matt. ix. 13.) The fountain of his blood was purposely opened, to wash away and cleanse the guilt of those sins, and that which we have which is sincerely repented of, and forsaken. (Zech. xiii. 1.) Therefore, if we are truly sincere, and if we seriously and earnestly desire to serve God to the best

of our power, we need not forbear going to the sacrament, out of an apprehension of our unworthiness; I because this sense of our unworthiness, together with a serious and sincere desire of being better, and doing better, and an humble and thankful remembrance of Christ's death, and a lively faith in God's mercies through him, and love and charity for all the world, are the best qualifications which we can possibly bring with us to the holy sacrament. Upon the whole then, no sufficient excuse can be alleged, for neglecting to receive the blessed sacrament; and, if nothing will justify us in absenting from it, the plain consequence is, that we ought to receive it, and that frequently. And surely, if we consider the great and wonderful love of our blessed Saviour, in dying for us, we shall be abundantly convinced of the obligations we are under to do this in remembrance of him. Such a surprising degree of love and affection, as the son of God has shewn for us sinful men, calls aloud for our most grateful acknowledgments. Such wonderful kindness certainly requires some small returns on our parts. But, to say the truth, what returns can such frail, indigent creatures, as we are, make for such an astonishing instance of the divine love? None indeed suitable to the greatness of our blessed Saviour's love and compassion for us; but still we ought to do as much as we can; every thing that lies in our power. We ought to give some marks, at least, of our gratitude; we ought to catch at every opportunity of shewing our inclinations and our readiness to acknowledge his goodness to us. This, surely, is the least that we can do; and this small acknowledgment, inconsiderable as it is, is all that God requires of us. Almost every man that breathes, let him be never so poor, has a heart and a tongue; and if his heart be grateful, and his tongue thankful, this is all that God desires. My son, give me thy heart, says Solomon. (Prov. xxi. 26.) And Isaiah tells us that God looketh to him that is poor, and of low estate. (Isaiah lxvi. 1.) We have it therefore in our power, the poorest and meanest of us all, to shew our thankfulness for God's mercies; and if we are backward in doing this, we are utterly excusable. Our happiness in this life, and our salvation

tion in the next, depend, in a very great measure, upon the faithful discharge of this duty. It is the command of our Saviour, that we should *do this in remembrance of him*; and if we presume to neglect it, we cannot possibly be saved, according to the terms of the gospel. *There is no salvation in any other*: there is no entrance into heaven, but through him; and therefore, those that will not enter in through him, cannot enter in at all. Our Lord himself has told us, that he is *the door of the sheep*; (John, x. 7.) and then he repeats it, with an addition; *I am the door*, says he; *by me, if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture*; (ver. 9.)

Observe here, that our Saviour says, *If any man enter in by me, he shall be saved*: observe this, I say, and mark it well too. For this is as much as to say, that none shall be saved, who will not enter in by him. Consider this, I beseech you, *ye that forget God, and your Saviour*; lest they pluck you away, and there be none to deliver you. (Psa. l. 22.) For indeed, who should deliver you, if your Saviour will not? There is no other Saviour, no other Christ, but the crucified Jesus. As St. Paul says, *For there is one God, and one Mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself a ransom for all*. (1 Tim. ii. 5, 6.) But before this ransom will actually and finally redeem us from the penalty of sin, and the wrath of God, we must be obedient to the commands of our heavenly Saviour; and as he has enjoined us to receive the blessed sacrament, in remembrance of his passion and death, let us not presume to live in the open and constant neglect of it. For, if we dare to disobey his command, we cannot possibly be saved by him; and, as I said before, there is no one else that can save us. In order then that we may all of us receive it worthily, and as we ought to do, give me leave, in the second place,

II. To shew briefly what is that preparation which is necessary towards receiving the sacrament worthily, and as we ought to do.

And, to this end, I shall think it sufficient to enlarge a little upon the concluding clause of our church catechism. This tells us; that in order hereunto, we must examine ourselves, whether we repent ourselves truly of our former sins; whether we stedfastly purpose to lead a

new life; whether we have a lively faith in God's mercy through Christ; whether we have a thankful remembrance of his death; and whether we are in charity with all men. Of each of these, a little in particular.

And first, we must examine ourselves, whether we repent ourselves truly of our former sins. This is, if we consider it, absolutely necessary to the worthy participation of the Lord's supper. For, indeed, if we do not sincerely repent, what should we go there for? So long as we continue in a state of impenitence, we have nothing to do with God, nor God with us; unless it be to punish us. The fountain of our Saviour's blood was, it must be owned, opened for uncleanness; but not such uncleanness as is cherished and fostered, and wilfully and obstinately continued in. It is not the hardened sinner, but the returning sinner, that is the object of his compassion and care. It is not the malicious, incorrigible offender, but those who labour, and are heavy laden with the burden of their sins, that are promised pardon and rest unto their souls. If then we do not truly repent of our former sins, it is a monstrous presumption to go to the sacrament, and so it is likewise to come to church: because this is, in effect, to mock God; to come into his more immediate presence, all defiled and polluted, when we are most unfit to appear before him, and to ask his pardon, and to beg his blessing; at the same time that we live, and resolve to live, in open rebellion against him.

If therefore we would be accepted in the sacrament, we must draw near with unfeigned reverence, and approach it with awe; we must repent truly of our past sins, and stedfastly purpose to lead a new life; which is the second article of inquiry, in our preparation for it. If we are not firmly resolved to lead a new life, this is a sign that we have not truly repented; that we are still in our sins. And therefore, without such a stedfast resolution, we are not fit for the sacrament, and cannot reap any benefit from it. The design of our Saviour's coming was, *to redeem us from all iniquity, and to purify unto himself a peculiar people zealous of good works*. (Tit. ii. 14.) Unless then we resolve firmly to be good for the future, we may as well, and better, stay away; for, to go to the sacrament, and to re-

solve upon going on in our former sins, would be only to mock God, and to increase the measure of our guilt. For which reason, we should examine our hearts strictly and impartially, that so we may know whether we are truly sincere, and in good earnest or not.

Next we are to inquire, whether we have a lively faith in God's mercy through Christ? This is the very foundation and ground-work of all. It is this that puts us upon exerting our utmost endeavours; for, of ourselves, we can do nothing; we are nothing; and our best services would go for nothing, unless the deficiency of them were abundantly supplied by the precious merits of our blessed Saviour's passion and death. We could not presume to go to the Lord's table, trafficking in our own righteousness; but, relying upon God's manifold and great mercies, *We have boldness and access with confidence, by the faith of Christ.* (Eph. iii. 12.) For his sake, we hope to have our imperfect services graciously accepted by God: because, *being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.* (Rom. v. 1.)

And not only this; but we must examine ourselves farther, whether we have a thankful remembrance of our Saviour's death; because the very end and design of the sacrament was to promote and to perpetuate a due sense and a grateful remembrance of it. *Do this,* says our Lord, *in remembrance of me.* Therefore, it must be such a devout, affectionate remembrance of it, as fills our hearts with love and gratitude. It is not sufficient to remember only, that there was once such a person as Jesus Christ; and that he died for us. We must not think of him, and his death, in such a cold, lifeless manner; but we must consider, what a terrible, desperate condition we should have been in, if Christ had not died to save us; and this reflection should inspire us with the warmest and most affectionate sense of this wonderful deliverance; this should imprint upon our minds a settled and lasting hatred of sin; since it was so odious in the sight of God, as to require so costly a sacrifice to expiate and atone for it; and the consideration of this del-

iverance should bind us in the strongest manner to our gracious Redeemer. It should create in us the greatest love, and the most ardent affection for him. It should teach us to think nothing too much to do for him, who has been pleased to do so much and such great things for us.

And as we have not an opportunity of shewing our love to him, and our gratitude to his memory, as much as his goodness to us deserves, we must love our brethren for his sake, and be in charity with all men.

This is the last article of inquiry in our preparatory examination before the sacrament. If our hearts tell us that we are, then we are, thus far at least, qualified as we should be. But if we are not, although we have already brought our gift to the altar, yet if we remember that our brother hath aught against us, we must leave there our gift before the altar, and go our way; first be reconciled to our brother, and then come, and offer our gift. For God prefers mercy before sacrifice; and our Saviour says, *if we forgive not men their trespasses, neither will our Father forgive our trespasses.* (Matt. vi. 15.)

To conclude therefore; if we repent us truly of our former sins; if we steadfastly purpose to lead a new life; if we have a lively faith in God's mercy through Christ; if we have a thankful remembrance of his death; and if we are in charity with all men; this is the true wedding garment; and if we have this on, we shall be fit guests for that heavenly banquet the holy sacrament; and this brings me, in the third place,

III. To shew the benefit and advantage of receiving the sacrament, when it is received with such a preparation and disposition of mind.

But not having time for this at present, I must beg leave to defer it to the next opportunity.

Now, to God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost, be ascribed, as is due, all honour, praise, might, majesty, and dominion, now and ever more. Amen.

Y

S E R M O N CXVIII.

The Benefits and Advantages of the worthy receiving of the blessed Sacrament: and an Exhortation thereunto.

LUKE, xxii. 20.

—This do in remembrance of me.

IN my last discourse on these words, I proposed, in treating of them, to observe the following method:

I. To shew the duty and obligation of receiving the blessed sacrament, and that frequently.

II. The preparation which is necessary towards the receiving of it worthily, and as we ought to do.

III. The benefits and advantages of it, when it is received in this manner. And,

IV. To conclude all with a suitable exhortation.

The two first of these heads I have already gone through: and I come now, in the third place, to shew,

III. What are the benefits and advantages of receiving the holy sacrament, when it is received with those qualifications before-mentioned.

The benefits and advantages which arise from the due performance of this duty are of two sorts; they are either such as naturally flow from it, or else such as are always annexed to it. As to the first, if we frequently receive the blessed sacrament, and that with a becoming devotion, it will greatly contribute to strengthen and confirm us in our christian course; the very preparation for it will be a means to preserve us from sin, and to spur us on to our duty. For, so long as we look back upon our past miscarriages with grief and sorrow, with hatred and indignation, we shall be less likely to return unto them again; so long as we keep in mind our good resolutions of obedience and amendment of life, we shall be more likely to watch, and to guard against our several failings; to observe and to check every motion, and every tendency towards them, and to avoid all those occasions which lead unto them: so long as we are duly and deeply sensible of our own unworthiness, we shall be more convinced of the necessity we are under of relying entirely upon the merits of our blessed Saviour,

and imploring the assistances of his divine grace: so long as we are devoutly thankful for God's mercy in Christ, and have a grateful remembrance of his death, we shall be naturally disposed to make all the returns we possibly can, for so great a blessing; we shall be strongly inclined to give every possible mark of our thankfulness; we shall think nothing too much to do, and nothing too much to suffer, for such a kind and merciful Saviour; and we shall think ourselves bound in the strongest manner to respect his memory, to revere his authority, and to obey his commands.

If again, we are in charity with all men, if we love as brethren, and live together as children of the same Father, this is one very considerable part of our christian duty; and the same principles that help to carry us thus far will, it is to be hoped, have a proportionable influence upon every other part of our behaviour. So that upon the whole we see, if we receive the blessed sacrament in a worthy becoming manner, that is, with those preparatory dispositions of mind before-mentioned, it will naturally contribute to make us good men, and good christians. These are the benefits and advantages which naturally arise from the due performance of this important duty; and beside these, there are others which God has, in his great mercy, annexed to the faithful discharge of it.

The advantages of this latter sort are, 1. The pardon of our past sins. 2. Grace to restrain and preserve us from them for the future. And 3dly, the consequences of both; which are, peace of mind in this life, and the well-grounded hopes of everlasting happiness in the next.

1. And first, in the due receiving of this holy sacrament, we do assuredly obtain the pardon and remission of our past sins.

This holy ordinance is, as it were, a sort of supplement to baptism; and without this, baptism would, in most cases, be ineffectual to our salvation. And the reason of this is very plain; for although baptism does, in virtue of our Saviour's promise, and for the sake of his merits, thereby transferred and made over to us, put us in a state of grace and favour with God; I say, notwithstanding that we are by this means admitted into covenant with God; yet are we entitled to the benefits

of this covenant, only upon condition of sincere and universal obedience for the time to come. Any one single deliberate act of sin is enough to make us forfeit our title, and to cut us off from all the benefits of this covenant. Hereby we break the covenant, and divest ourselves, as it were, of our former right. And God knows, we are all of us too apt to do such things as are sufficient to make this covenant void, and to cancel the agreement which before subsisted between God and us.

If indeed after baptism we were made impeccable, that is, if we were secured from ever falling into sin after it; then the covenant would remain in force, and all the benefits of it would be insured to us, beyond all possibility of forfeiting or losing them; but this is far, very far from being the case with any of us. What therefore must be done in this case, when we have wilfully broken the covenant, and deprived ourselves of all the privileges belonging to it? How shall we renew it, or what shall we do to get into covenant again with God? We cannot be baptized a second time. This holy ordinance of baptism is not to be repeated. What then must be done in this case? Why this must be done: We must have recourse to the supplemental part of baptism, the holy sacrament of Christ's body and blood: we must come to this fountain, which was opened for uncleaness, and here wash, and be clean: we must, with sincere repentance, and an humble faith in the precious merits of his passion and death, so eat the flesh of our dear Lord Jesus Christ, and drink his blood, that our sinful bodies may be made clean by his body, and our souls washed through his most precious blood.

In this holy sacrament, the officiating minister does shew, and set forth to God the Father, the sufferings and death of his only-begotten Son; he begs leave most humbly to remonstrate to him, that our Saviour's sufferings and death were all of them undergone for the sake of such heavy-laden and returning sinners as we are; he begs therefore that God would graciously pardon our weakness, and pity our blindness: and as he, in his great wisdom, best knows whereof we are made, and out of his abundant mercy graciously remembereth that we are but dust; the minister implores, and be-

seches him, in the most humble and earnest manner, to overlook all our past faults; to cast all our offences behind him; to accept our sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving; and to grant, that by the merits and death of his Son Jesus Christ, and through faith in his blood, we and all the whole church may obtain remission of our sins, and all other benefits of his passion.

This, my brethren, is what the officiating minister does in our behalf, and what we ought to join with him in doing, when we receive the blessed sacrament. And, as God desireth not the death of a sinner, but rather that he should return and live, he graciously looks upon us, in his Son Jesus Christ, and for his sake; and when he looks upon us in this endearing light, and beholds us with all the tenderness and pity, with all the love and affection of a kind and good parent, he graciously overlooks all our past faults and miscarriages; he receives us returning prodigals with the arms of his mercy, and our sins and offences remembers no more. In this manner is the great charter of baptism restored and confirmed; thus is the returning sinner reinstated in all his former privileges; and thus is he again entitled to all those benefits of Christ's death which he had, by the wilful breach of his baptismal vow, unhappily forfeited and lost. And this naturally leads me to the second benefit annexed to the due celebration of this holy ordinance, which is,

II. The help and assistance of the holy Spirit of God.

The bread and wine are, as our church catechism admirably well expresses it; no more than an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace; and this sign was ordained by Christ himself, as a means whereby we receive the same, and a pledge to assure us thereof. What our daily food is to our bodies, that the grace of God is to our souls; as that contributes and helps to increase our bulk and stature, and to repair the decays of our weak nature, so does this contribute and help to make us grow in virtue and godliness, to proceed from one degree of goodness to the other, till such time as we come to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ. For whosoever bath, to him, says our Saviour, shall be given, and he shall have more abundance. (Matt. xiii. 12.)

If then we receive the sacrament in the manner that we ought to do, we shall not only obtain the pardon of our past sins, but also find grace to help in the time of need, in the hour of temptation. But to conclude this head,

III. The last benefits which arise from the due performance of this duty, are peace of mind in this life, and the well-grounded hopes of eternal happiness in the next; which will be the certain consequence of our worthy receiving, if we only persevere, and hold out to the end.

We shall assuredly reap, if we faint not; provided only that our patience have her perfect work, that so we may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing. (James, i. 4.) For, as St. James says, *Blessed is the man that endureth temptation; for when he is tried he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him; (i. 12.)* And nothing can more contribute to support us under temptation, and to preserve us from falling, than the devout and frequent receiving of the blessed sacrament. And this brings me to the fourth and last thing, which is,

IV. To conclude all with a suitable exhortation. After all that I have already said upon this subject, one should think, that I need to say nothing more, to convince people of the necessity of receiving the blessed sacrament, and to persuade them to the due and faithful discharge of this important duty. But however it comes to pass, so it is, that there are very many who, in all other things, keep up the appearance of a religious behaviour, but in this respect are utterly inexcusable: I say, the appearance of a religious behaviour; for, after all, it is really no more than an appearance. If such persons were truly sincere, and in good earnest, they would never dare to neglect the sacrament, as they do. If they really believed the being of a God; if they were heartily convinced of the truth of the christian religion; if they only considered that they have souls to take care of, as well as bodies; if they were but duly sensible of their own unworthiness to appear in God's presence; and if they are not deeply and heartily sensible of it, I am sure this is no great mark either of their wisdom or of their goodness. I say, if they were but duly sensible of their own unworthiness, they would think

themselves infinitely happy that they had a Saviour, a Redeemer, a Mediator, and an Advocate, to stand up between them and God, as it were, to screen them from the anger of an offended Deity; to intercede in their behalf; to plead their cause, and to solicit and procure their pardon. If they were but sensible how much they wanted and stood in need of such a merciful Saviour, they would no longer dare to affront and provoke this their gracious Deliverer by despising his authority, and disobeying his command. If the word spoken by angels was steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompence of reward, how shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation? (Heb. ii. 2, 3.) Or, as it is in the tenth chapter of this epistle, *If he that despised Moses's law, died without mercy; of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing?*

Give me leave therefore to speak now with great plainness of speech, unto all of you that have hitherto neglected this sacred ordinance, and to all you likewise that seldom or never repair to it. For surely, next to the not receiving at all, is the monstrous carelessness of too many people who very seldom receive the blessed sacrament. Tell me then, what is it that you come to church for? Is it out of custom? is it only to see, and be seen? is it only to make remarks? is it only to pass away an idle hour, that lies heavy upon your hands? is it only to satisfy your curiosity, in hearing this or that preacher? or else, is it only to promote your temporal interests, by keeping up a form of godliness, without the power of it? It is indeed to be feared, that some one or other of these reasons brings a great many people to church, who would not come to it otherwise. But still I flatter myself, that this is the case of very few of those that now hear me. And therefore tell me, I pray you, what did you come to church to-day for? did you come out of a principle of duty and conscience? was it to profess and declare your dependence upon God, your belief of his promises, and your faith in the merits of your crucified Saviour? was it to obtain the pardon of your past sins,

and the grace of God, to help and assist you in the time of need? I say, were these the true reasons of your coming to church this day? Charity inclines me to think they were: and I trust in God, your own consciences will tell you, that these were the true reasons of your assembling yourselves together to-day in this place. But then at the same time, tell me again, if these reasons did really bring you to church, what is the reason why you will not likewise receive the blessed sacrament? is it, because you think that you are not fit for it? If this be the case, then why are you not fit for it? Nothing but a want of sincerity can make you unfit for it. If you are fit to join in the prayers of the church, then are you likewise fit to receive the sacrament. Whoever is fit for the one, is likewise fit for the other; and nothing can make you unfit for the sacrament, which does not likewise make you equally unfit for the other. If you have dealt sincerely with God this day, when you joined in the prayers of our excellent church, then you may safely go to the sacrament. If you repent truly of your past sins; if you stedfastly resolve to lead a new life for the time to come; if you have a firm faith and confidence in the merits of our blessed Saviour, and are disposed to shew your thankfulness for his mercies to you; and are in charity with all men; then are you as fit and as worthy to receive the sacrament, as a weak imperfect man can possibly be.

But, if you do not repent sincerely; if you do not stedfastly resolve to amend your lives; if you are not sensible of your own unworthiness, and have not a firm faith in the merits of Christ's death; if you are not truly thankful for all his mercies; and are not in charity with your neighbours; what, in the name of God, have you been doing for this hour together? Have you been mocking God? have you been affronting and insulting your Saviour, and imposing upon your neighbours and yourselves too? I hope, and trust in God, you have not. If you are not sincere, then you are not fit to come to church, nor to say so much as the Lord's Prayer: but if you are truly sincere, and in good earnest, then you may safely go to the sacrament.

Let me entreat and conjure you therefore, not to neglect receiving the holy

sacrament any longer. He that slight, and disobey the command of his Saviour, his dying Saviour, will not, and cannot possibly be saved by him. If you wilfully disobey one command of his, you will be as certainly punished as if you had disobeyed all. *For whosoever shall break one of the least of his commandments, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven.* (Matt. v. 19.) I beseech you therefore, as an ambassador, in Christ's stead, (2 Cor. v. 20.) come to this holy sacrament; and do this so small a thing, in remembrance of him, who has done so much and such great things for you. Do not think to excuse yourselves any longer, by any idle, silly pretences. What I have said is enough to shew the wretched folly of all such excuses. You cannot plead ignorance or prejudice in this matter; and therefore if you disregard and reject what I now say to you all, in the name of God, and the blessed Jesus, you will, by so doing, disregard and reject the counsel and commandment of God your Saviour. And the dreadful consequence of both will be, that he will finally and for ever reject you, when he shall come in the glory of his Father, with his holy angels, to take vengeance upon all those that have not known him here in this world; and have not called upon his name as they ought to do. But that this may never be the case of any one person here present, may God of his infinite mercy grant, for the sake of his Son Jesus Christ.

To whom, with the Father and the Holy Ghost, three persons and one God, be ascribed, as is most due, all honour, praise, might, majesty, and dominion, now and for ever-more. Amen.

S E R M O N CXIX.

By PATRICK DELANY, D. D.

Dean of Down.

On the Duties of the Married State.

EPHES. v. 33.

Nevertheless, let every one of you in particular, so love his wife even as himself; and the wife let her reverence her husband.

THE apostle's principal design, in this epistle to the Ephesians, is, to deter these new converts from all those corrup-

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tions that reigned in the heathen world, and exhort them to that purity of life and manners, enjoined by the gospel: that they should *put off, concerning the former conversation, the old man, which is corrupt, according to the deceitful lusts; and be renewed in the spirit of their mind, putting on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness.*

Many of the deities worshipped by the heathen world, were the greatest monsters of iniquity and uncleanness that ever were heard of. And therefore it is no wonder if their worshippers thought there was no evil in those actions, which were authorized by the example of their gods. Nay, on the contrary, forasmuch as all religion directs us to the imitation of what we adore, hence it came to pass, that the most flagitious and monstrous impurities were not only practised, but enjoined, enjoined as necessary rites of adoration, and actually performed in their very temples. And as this was the practice in many other places, it was remarkably so at Ephesus, (whither this epistle is directed,) as we are assured by Strabo and Athenæus. And therefore the apostle's design, in this epistle, is to reclaim his converts of that city from those abominations to which they were before devoted.

And in order to do this, he gives them to understand, that the God they were now taught to worship, was a Being of infinite perfection and purity; and therefore, to make their adoration acceptable to him, they must put off their former pollution, and imitate his purity: they must *put off the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts; and put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness.*

For, however the guilt of their former corruptions might be alleviated from the ignorance in which they were then involved, yet were they now, from the advantage of better information and instruction, altogether without excuse, if they committed the same enormities. For, saith he, *Ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light: but fornication and all uncleanness, let it not be once named among you, as becometh saints. For this ye know, that no adulterer, or unclean person, hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God.*

And soon after this, the apostle subjoins the duty of husbands and wives; the duty of submission and respect in the one, and of love and tenderness in the other: modestly implying, that a religious regard to the matrimonial contract was the most natural and rational method of avoiding those sensual corruptions, into which the heathen world was sunk. And when he hath shewn, that the original union of one man with one woman was an emblem of the mystical union of Christ and his church, he adds, *Nevertheless, let every one of you in particular, &c.* That is, but whatever this mystery may be, however, setting aside the mystery, *let every one of you in particular, so love his wife even as himself; and the wife see that she reverence her husband.*

Having thus explained the occasion and intent of these words, I now proceed, from them, to lay down to you the duties of the married state.

I shall begin with the husband's duty to his wife. And this may be reduced to these three heads; love, fidelity, and support.

First, Husbands are to love their wives. And this they are engaged to do, from all the natural and moral motives that can influence a rational creature.

And, first, it is observed, that an equality is necessary to the establishment of an entire affection and friendship in life. For this reason, tyrants and slaves are no more to be tied together in the bands of love, than an ass and an elephant can be harnessed under one yoke. Equality is necessary to union; and therefore love is observed, either to find all persons equal, or to make them so. This the great Author of our nature well knew, and therefore he created the first pair perfectly equal; and, to express this equality, as divines observe, he formed Eve from Adam's side: the woman was taken from that part, rather than from any other, either higher or lower, to signify, that she is neither her husband's mistress, nor yet his slave; that as she is not to insult, so she is not to be insulted; but to be treated upon a foot of natural equality, with affection and regard.

Again, Union is necessary to love; to have the same desires and aversions. For this reason God Almighty made the first pair of one flesh. And Adam said, *this*

is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called woman, because she was taken out of man.

And this natural union of the first pair was but an emblem of that moral and mystical union, that was to be established between all succeeding pairs, that should be joined together in the holy state of matrimony to the end of the world.

And hence it is, that when Adam had declared his sense of this union that joined him to Eve, he adds, as from himself, (yet most evidently by divine appointment,) *therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife; and they two shall be one flesh:* signifying, that the bonds of marriage should from that moment be more powerful than the bonds of nature; and that the tie of conjugal affection, which bound a man to his wife, should exceed the nearest and strongest ties of blood: and for that reason a man should forsake even his father and his mother, from whom he derived his being, and cleave to his wife, which was to be his second self, and of consequence nearer and dearer to him even than his parents, as ourselves are nearer and dearer to us than any other mortals.

And indeed, when we consider the nature of this union, we shall see evident reason why man and wife should be nearer and dearer to one another than any other mortals. For, first, they are united upon the terms of as intimate a correspondence, and as universal and entire a communion, as if they were one soul and one body. And, secondly, their interest is in all respects perfectly the same. That which tends to make one happy, naturally tends to make the other happy also; and that which tends to make the one miserable and uneasy, tends to make the other miserable at the same time.

The interest of the nearest friends in the world, out of marriage, will often interfere; and it requires great generosity and disinterestedness not to repine oftentimes at the good success of the nearest and dearest friends; because, how intimate soever their correspondence may be, their interests are still distinct, and often opposite. *nor is it possible to put a case, wherein they are in all respects the same, except in marriage.*

Suppose a brother that I loved as my life; yet still my estate is not his estate, my honour is not his honour; my children

are not his children. But in marriage the case is actually so. Your estate is your wife's estate; it is actually her property, as much as yours. Your honour is her honour; and your children are her children, as dear and near to her, as they are to you; and the care of them, and provision for them, as much her concern, and her interest. And hence it is that the idea of an entire and perfect friendship is no where to be met with but in the married state.

I remember but three or four instances of extraordinary friendship, recorded by profane writers, in all antiquity; and three of these are downright poetical fictions; and the fourth, viz. that of Alexander and Ephestion, seems to have no better foundation than an extravagant imitation of Achilles and Patroclus: or, suppose it established in a particular inclination and interest, it was in this view, no more than such as might engage any two men of honour as nearly, to this day; and, no doubt, hath and doth engage thousands, every day. Nor was it founded either in a similitude of manners, (which is its surest basis,) or in a fixed union of universal interest.

There is also one authentic instance of extraordinary friendship in sacred history, viz. that of David and Jonathan. And this, although founded in a similitude of manners between two generous and martial youths, yet seems to be raised much above the common level, by divine appointment, for the preservation of David. And yet perhaps, had Jonathan out-lived the generosity of youth, and seen his friend placed high above him; his friend a sovereign, and himself a subject; his friendship would not have so entirely survived his ambition and interest.

Whereas in marriage, where the union is for life, and the interest is always the same, the reasons for mutual affection and confidence must always continue, and increase with generous and virtuous spirits, to the last moment of life. To say nothing of those powerful engagements to love and tenderness, from the natural attractions of a modest and amiable woman; and those thousand endearments, (no where else to be met with,) which God hath in his great wisdom established for the continuance of so useful a commerce, without which society could not subsist.

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And nothing surely can be a finer emblem of this union, than the two pieces of wood which God commanded the prophet Ezekiel to join together, and they became one in his hand, (Ezek. xxxvii.) the marriage-tie being, by the divine command, like the covering and enclosing rind, which bound both into one body, circulating all the mutual and endearing offices of affection and interest through the one, in the marriage union, as the nutritive and vital juices are circulated through the other, in the natural.

The next duty that husbands owe their wives, is fidelity.

As the laws of God and nature oblige you to love your wives with distinguished affection and tenderness, so do they oblige you to love them alone. And this is what is meant by fidelity in the married state.

And this duty is demonstrably founded in the law of nature. For since it appears, by accurate observations upon the increase of mankind, that there are more males born in the world than females, and that in a constant and established course, in the proportion of about thirteen to twelve, nearly; and since the right of marriage is a right of nature, which all men have equal claim to, and yet this right cannot be obtained, if any number of men be allowed to have many wives at once; therefore no man must have many; because, as many wives as such men have above one at once, so many must such a number of other men want.

If one man, for example, hath twenty wives to his share, nineteen men must of necessity be robbed each of them of their natural right. And consequently, if it be agreeable to the law of nature, that nineteen men should have nineteen wives, then it is directly contrary to the law of nature, that one man should have twenty wives, or any number above one at once.

And that this union of one man with one woman should be for life, is evident from our blessed Saviour's express words: *What God hath joined, let no man put asunder.* And therefore if man cannot, must not put them asunder, they must continue together, till it please God to part them by death. And so far was God from intending to part them before, that he plainly intended they should sooner part with every thing else, even their nearest

and dearest friends. For this cause, *shall a man leave father and mother, and cleave to his wife.*

And indeed if this union were to continue only at the discretion of either party, or for any term less than life, the evils that would be devolved upon society, from such a limitation, would be infinite: the great engagement to peace and mutual love would be dissolved; all the trust and confidence of the perfectest friendship would be entirely destroyed; the assurance of consolation in distress, of support in sickness, and society in age, would be taken away from the earth; and the interests of families would be torn into ten thousand distractions. In short, the evils of life would be infinitely multiplied by it, and its greatest blessings infinitely impaired.

And certainly, if marriage is not to be allowed upon any other than the christian scheme, much less is adultery or fornication to be endured, upon any pretence whatsoever; since all the arguments, either against arbitrary divorces, or, in other words, either against temporary marriages, or a plurality of wives, conclude with much greater force against both these vices; inasmuch as these vices naturally tend to destroy all the blessings and securities of love and friendship. They create endless jealousy, and contention, and distrust; and either ruin your fortune, or divert it from its natural course. And, in the next place, it is impossible for you to indulge either of these vices, without allowing yourself either in the corruption of innocence, or the enjoyment of corruption; and either of these naturally overwhelm the soul with so much confusion, and distraction, and remorse, as must, if you are not hardened into the malignity of fiends, either conclude in the bitterness of repentance, or in the distractions of despair.

For certainly, if you think at all, you cannot bear the reflection of having corrupted innocence, of having betrayed a virtuous and valuable woman to infamy, and all the dreadful evils that await it, to poverty and prostitution, and such a corruption of body and mind, as will render her at once the reproach and horror of human nature.

On the other hand, can you, with less reproach to your reason, give yourself up to the arms of a prostitute? to mercenary

cenary and polluted embraces; to the wiles of serpents, that twine around you, for no other reason but to prey upon you, and sting you to death?

And to deter you from such a shameful and corrupt course, read Solomon's reflections, read the observations of the wisest of mankind, upon the danger of such a conduct, and the sure ruin that awaits it, in the 6th and 7th chapters of his Proverbs.

To keep you from the evil woman, from the flattery of the tongue of a strange woman, lust not after her beauty in thine heart, neither let her take thee with her eye-lid. Can a man take fire in his bosom, and his cloaths not be burnt? Can one go upon hot coals, and his feet not be burnt? So be that goeth in to his neighbour's wife, whosoever toucheth her, shall not be innocent. And surely it is full as certain, that he that goeth in to a polluted prostitute, whosoever toucheth her, shall neither be innocent, nor unhurt; but doth in truth take fire into his bosom, almost in a literal sense.

Again, saith the wise man, *Whoso committeth adultery with a woman, lacketh understanding. He that doth it, destroyeth his own soul. A wound and dishonour shall he get, and his reproach shall not be wiped away. Nor is either the wound or the reproach less certain in the commerce of a mercenary harlot. The arts with which these wily creatures lie in wait to deceive and to destroy the thoughtless unwary part of mankind, are most admirably set forth in the 7th chapter of the Proverbs; where, after the wise man hath described the lewd woman's shameless allurements at large, he then adds the sure ruin of the simple one that was caught by them. With her much fair speech she caused him to yield; with the flattering of her lips she forced him; he goeth after her straitway, as an ox to the slaughter, or as a fool to the correction of the stocks; till a dart strike through his liver; as a bird hasteth to the snare, and knoweth not, that it is for his life. Hearken unto me now therefore, O ye children, and attend to the words of my mouth. Let not thine heart decline to her ways, go not astray in her paths. For she hath cast down many wounded; yea many strong men have been slain by her. Her house is the way to hell, going down to the chambers of death.*

And although vicious liberties are commonly regarded as less criminal on the

side of the man, yet in reality, and in the sight of God, it is not so; because the obligation to fidelity is equal, is exactly the same, on both sides. And therefore the same apostle that tells us (1 Cor. vii.) that *the wife hath not power over her own body, but the husband*; tells us also, in the same place, that *the husband likewise hath not power over his own body, but the wife.*

It is true, the reputation of families is more concerned in the chastity of the wife; but, on the other hand, the interest and well-being of families is, for the most part, more concerned in the chastity of the husband; because he hath it more in his power (generally speaking) to destroy the fortune of the family by vicious extravagance in this point than the woman hath; and actually does so, in twenty instances to one. And therefore, however men may be indulged in corruptions of this kind, from the liberties of a looser education, and from the worst title in the world, the privilege of a long practice in sin; perhaps too from the partiality of human laws; yet are they, both from the law of nature and the law of God, under equal ties of fidelity with the wife, and under equal guilt from the violation of it. And this we know, that *no whoremonger, or unclean person, hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ, and of God.* And therefore, *let no man deceive you with vain words; for, because of these things, cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience.*

The last duty of the husband is to support and maintain his wife; and this ariseth from the consideration of their being one flesh. Therefore the apostle tells us, that *men ought so to love their wives as their own bodies; he that loveth his wife, loveth himself. For as the man ever yet (saith he) hated his own flesh, but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the church.*

From hence it appears, that the same obligations that are upon you, for your own support and nourishment, engage you also to the support and nourishment of your wives. And this is accounted the more direct and immediate duty of the husband, because the administration and management of the fortune is (generally speaking) in his hands; that being, by the divine appointment, his province; as being better fitted by nature for the

fatigues

fatigues and hurry of life; and for the most part endowed with a greater strength both of body and mind, to enable him to make a proper provision for his family. I say for the most part, because there are many particular instances where this care rests chiefly upon the wife, when she is found blessed by Almighty God with better talents for those purposes. But, generally speaking, the business of the woman is the care of her house and family, to relieve the man from the fatigue of domestic concerns; and to be in this respect a help-meet for him; and to see that what he provides is prudently managed, and carefully preserved.

And thus I have gone through the several duties which the husband owes to the wife, viz. love, fidelity, and support.

S E R M O N CXX.

The same Subject continued.

EPHES. v. 33.

Nevertheless, let every one of you in particular, so love his wife even as himself; and the wife see that she reverence her husband.

I PROCEED now to the duties of the wife; and these are, love, fidelity, and obedience.

First, She is to love her husband; and that upon the same principles, and for the very same reasons, that he is to love her.

First, Because they are one flesh; for this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave unto his wife; and they two shall be one flesh. And in truth they are joined together upon terms of as entire and thorough a communion, as if they were one soul, and one body: and secondly, because their interests are in all respects perfectly the same, which is the truest foundation of friendship.

The husband's happiness naturally tends to make the wife happy at the same time; and his misery, to make her miserable; his riches make her rich; and his poverty makes her poor. It is always their interest to wish and avoid, to desire and to detest, the same things; and surely to have the very same interest, the same desires and aversions, to be happy in each other's happiness, and miserable in each other's misery, are the strongest engagements, and the surest foundations of en-

tire friendship, and perfect affection, that can possibly be imagined.

Secondly, She is to be faithful to him; and as the reasons of fidelity are the same both in the husband and the wife, the crime of infidelity is more shameful and scandalous in the woman; because it is committed against the rules of a more reserved and virtuous education, and against the natural decency and modesty of the sex; and, at the same time, is of far worse consequence to the honour of families, because it brings a lasting stain of infamy along with it; and, what is worse than all this, it often robs the right heir of his inheritance, and substitutes a spurious offspring into his place; an injury that is the more to be dreaded and avoided, because, when once it is committed, it is impossible to be repaired.

Thus much, however, may be said in honour of that sex, that this crime is less frequent among them; and rarely committed till the husband's infidelity, or ill conduct, hath first provoked to it.

And this is the true reason why the infidelity of the wife reflects so much scandal and dishonour upon the husband, because (generally speaking) his own vices and ill conduct have brought the evil upon him. And therefore the only true way of securing your own reputation in this point, as well as your wife's virtue, and the honour of your family, is to behave yourself with so much fidelity and tenderness towards her, as may entirely engage her affections, as well as her conscience, to you and you only.

And indeed, let any man reflect seriously upon the treatment the generality of wives meet with from their husbands, and then think impartially, whether they have not too much reason to be provoked at their rudeness and neglect. Before marriage they are adored and preferred before all the world; but soon, very soon after, they are slighted and disregarded, as if they were unworthy of common esteem; and they are slighted for the very same reasons for which they should be respectfully and tenderly treated. They observe at the same time, that their husbands can still treat other women with respect and complaisance; and that other men still continue to use them with respect and complaisance, and none but the husband slight and despises them; as if marriage, which is the strongest engage-

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ment to tenderness and affection, were but a privilege for contempt and rudeness. This is in truth provoking; and I am satisfied, the generality of those women who have been so unhappy and so wicked as to violate the marriage-vow, have been provoked to it by the rudeness and neglect of their husbands, or urged to it in revenge of their prior falsehood.

It is not indeed to be imagined, that men should treat their wives with the same reserve and formal complaisance after marriage; that the freedom and ease of friendship forbids; but why friendship and freedom should be a reason for ill treatment, I must own I cannot conceive. I am sure they should be reasons of a very different conduct; and I believe there is not a righter rule in life, or of more importance for the preservation of friendship, than this, never to let familiarity exclude respect.

But after all, wives that are so unhappy as to be too much provoked by the ill treatment of their husbands, should always remember, that their husbands' guilt doth not justify theirs; and much less will neglect or rudeness in the husband justify infidelity in the wife. There are arts of decency and good behaviour which have inexpressible charms; and if a woman can but have constancy enough to practise these, and to continue in well-doing, they are almost irresistible; and it is scarcely possible to imagine any husband so brutal, as not to be at last reclaimed by them. And women would be more solicitous to reclaim their husbands in this manner, by a course of good behaviour, if they considered that in so doing they consulted their own real interest, and the interest of their children; and greatly recommended themselves and their concerns to the favour and protection of Almighty God; and at the same time saved a soul alive. Whereas the contrary behaviour can tend to nothing but the utter ruin of their children, and their own mutual destruction, both of body and soul.

The next duty a wife owes her husband is assistance; that is, aid, comfort, relief, and support, in all the anxieties and exigencies of life. And hence it was, that when Adam was created, God Almighty declared it not good for him to be alone; and therefore he adds, *I will make him a help meet for him*. And therefore such

wives as think it beneath them to trouble themselves about low domestic concerns; that are above the care of their husbands and family, would do well to consider how they answer the end of their creation. Surely they cannot imagine they were made for no higher or nobler ends than to dress, or visit, or to be esteemed, like a statue or picture, for a fine shape, or a fair outside. Are these purposes worthy of infinite wisdom and goodness? No; God Almighty intended them not only for the support of society, but for consolation, friendship, and assistance; to be partakers of the husband's joys and cares; to lighten the labours of life, and increase all its enjoyments, by sharing in them. For, as cares are lessened by being divided, joys are increased by being communicated. And therefore what can be more desirable in life, than to have a prudent, a faithful, and an affectionate friend, who is perfectly in our interest, to alleviate all the evils, and increase all the happinesses that befall us? And to this purpose, God Almighty hath endowed the other sex, not only with more native tenderness, but likewise with a certain vivacity and gaiety of heart that bears up against misfortunes; or, at least, is not so long cast down under them, as men usually are. Their spirits are more light and volatile, and their imagination more sprightly; and this prompts them to think and speak a thousand agreeable things, which would never enter into the heavy heart of an anxious and thoughtful husband; and by that means inspires a cheerfulness which is not natural to him, and is a wonderful relief to the toils of life. And, without question, this is one great reason, why God Almighty hath endowed the other sex with a greater quickness and readiness of speech upon common occurrences, that the husband, upon his return into his house from the cares and labours of the day, might be entertained with cheerful accounts of his family-affairs, and with agreeable inquiries into his own conduct, not without pleasing and proper reflections upon both. And therefore that disposition to discourse, which melancholy and morose husbands are wont to censure as troublesome and impertinent in their wives, is, in truth, an instinct most wisely and graciously appointed of Almighty God, for the relief and joy of the conjugal state; and

and life would (in endless instances) be an insupportable load without it.

What therefore women are concerned to do upon this account, is this; not to speak less than they are naturally inclined to do, but to endeavour to speak better than the generality of them are taught, or wont to do. It is not their business to check the instinct that God Almighty hath endowed them with, but to direct it, and make it answer its true end, the relief and delight of their husband and their household; whereas, when it is diverted from its right end, and degenerates either into impertinent garrulity, or into brawling and abuse, it forms one or other of the most hateful and unbecoming characters in life. And therefore Solomon rightly observes (Prov. xxi.) that *it is better to dwell in a corner of the house-top, than with a brawling woman in a wide house.* That is, it is better to be confined to one spot on the top of a house, exposed to all the injuries of the weather, than enjoying all the advantages of shade and shelter, to be exposed to the assaults of a boisterous tongue. And again, *it is better to dwell in the wilderness, saith he, than with a contentious and angry woman;* that is, it is better to be banished the society of mankind, than be confined to such society as that.

Now there are two things required of women, in order to make their conversation agreeable; the first is, *the ornament of a meek spirit*, without which no other ornament will become them. And this, the apostle assures us, *is in the sight of God of high price*: nor is it less so in the eyes of men. The next is, that they endeavour to furnish their minds with a store of useful observations, for the conduct of life, from a competent knowledge of the manners and history of the world, a thorough acquaintance with the holy scriptures, a particular and exact study of their husbands' inclinations and interest, and a careful inquiry into the economy and good government of their family; and this, joined to a fund of virtue and good humour, will rightly direct their natural instinct, and make their conversation equally agreeable and useful; will give them new and lovelier charms, when those of youth and beauty are long since wasted and decayed.

And here I cannot but reflect with concern, upon the unhappy methods

which have obtained in the world in relation to the education of women. One of the first things that takes possession of their minds, is, the hopes of a husband; but how to become a faithful friend, and an agreeable amiable companion in the married state, are lessons rarely taught, and more rarely learnt. Superficial and shewy accomplishments are indeed inculcated with sufficient care; but how to acquire solid worth and useful knowledge makes, for the most part, but a small part of parental solicitude. By this means a woman becomes every thing to a husband, but what she should be; a social friend, and an useful assistant. Forgetting that the interest of all men makes that one essential part of the character of a good wife, laid down by Solomon, (Prov. xxxi. 26.) that *she openeth her mouth with wisdom, and in her tongue is the law of kindness.* That is, as she hath acquired habits of prudence and discretion from study and observation, so she hath made it a fixed rule to herself, not to be imperious or presuming upon her knowledge; but rather to make it a reason of constant cheerfulness and good humour, together with a ready, a rational, and an affectionate assistance in every exigency, and on every occasion; *in her tongue is the law of kindness.* And surely wisdom, so seasoned and sweetened, is amiable and delightful beyond expression. And therefore this character is crowned by Solomon with that noble encomium, *many daughters have done virtuously, but thou excellest them all.* That is, many other women may be as virtuous; but virtue thus recommended, virtue that is adorned with all the graces of prudence and good humour, is virtue in its highest and loveliest perfection; *thou excellest them all.* And again, *Favour is deceitful, and beauty is vain; but a woman that feareth the Lord, she shall be praised.* That is, the regard that ariseth from colour and complexion is transient and unsteady; beauty is deceitful; a fair face may cover a deformed mind, and is at best a short and uncertain recommendation; but piety and virtue are sure and lasting perfections, which will always entitle the woman that is blessed with them to eternal veneration and esteem.

But further, a good wife is in many instances to do yet more than this; she is not only to relieve her husband under his

his household cares, by the goodness of her humour, and sprightliness of her conversation; but she is likewise to lighten those cares, by dividing them with him, and bearing her part in the burden. And therefore the least that is to be expected from a wife, is, that whilst the husband is busied abroad, or in affairs that call off his attention from the care of his family, that care be supplied by her; and this constitutes the true character of a good wife; at least that part of it which is of principal and most universal use in life.

The care and good economy of a family is a business of a very distinct nature from that of making a provision for the support of it; the care of providing for a family, for the most part, resteth upon the husband; because that is a business of more labour and fatigue than women are ordinarily able to undergo; but then the administration of what is so provided, is the woman's province: this is the labour of life divided; and if either fail in their proper business, the affairs of the family are in a ruinous way. And upon this is founded that known observation, That a man must ask his wife whether he shall be rich; forasmuch as few men are able to take sufficient care both abroad and at home; and foreign care will be of small use, if the domestic be neglected. And therefore it is, that Solomon, in the character of a good wife, (Prov. xxxi. 11.) tells us, that *the heart of her husband shall safely trust in her, so that he shall have no need of spoil*. That is, she will manage his household affairs with so much prudence and fidelity, that her husband shall need no indirect methods of fraud or oppression to support her luxury and extravagance. Again, he tells us, (v. 27.) that *she looketh well to the ways of her household, and eateth not the bread of idleness*. Indeed he adds many other circumstances of great industry; such as her rising up by night, and plying the spindle and distaff, and providing cloaths for her husband and family; but these being circumstances of industry peculiar to a country life, and better adapted to the simpler ages of the world, when trades were not sufficiently settled and distributed into their distinct classes, I think them not necessary to be insisted on in this place.

Now, as the care of the house and family is the immediate and direct duty of

the wife, it is evident this duty cannot be discharged, if she be addicted to ramblings and going abroad, and do not delight to dwell with her family; and indeed, a disposition to running abroad, and neglecting the care of her household, is an argument of a light and vain mind; and is made, by Solomon, a mark of the most infamous character among women; for, when he describes a vicious woman, in the tire and habit of an harlot, he tells us, *she is loud and stubborn, her feet abide not in her house*. And therefore all women that would be deemed modest and virtuous, should avoid this character of neglecting their husbands and their homes, as a piece of ill conduct, that will lead them into many others; and such as seldom end but in infamy and ruin.

Solomon hath observed, that the ant is a fine emblem and example of industry; and the observations of modern naturalists have made this emblem yet more instructive to us, in the distribution of the conjugal care. The male ants, they tell us, are at a certain age furnished with wings, to facilitate their acquisition of food; whereas this advantage is denied the females, inasmuch as their province is the distribution of what is acquired.

Another principal and very important branch of the wife's duty, is, the education and care of her children. For the business of the father being for the most part without doors, and the man being from education and use less fitted for the lower cares that are due to children; having also less leisure to employ that way; having less gaiety to cheer and enliven their humours, and less natural tenderness to relieve all their little wants and afflictions; having, from nature, a stronger propensity to fullness and silence; and being upon that account less fitted to gratify the eager curiosity of children, in their endless inquiries after every thing that is new or unknown to them; for these reasons, and upon all these accounts, the early education of children rests almost entirely upon the wife; and she is in truth, by nature, much better fitted for it.

And, in order to qualify her for so great a trust, upon which the well-being of every family, and consequently of the whole world, doth so greatly depend, it is requisite that her mind be rightly formed, by a thorough acquaintance with the

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the scriptures, and some few useful books of devotion, to humility and meekness; to temperance and diligence; to humanity and charity; and, in one word, to all the virtues of a social and a christian life. And besides all this, it is necessary that she be furnished with a competent knowledge in the employments and accomplishments proper to each condition and age in life, that so she may be capable of directing her children how to employ their time agreeably and usefully, and conduct them gradually to virtue and goodness by her practice, as well as her precepts. And although the mother's principal business be the education and care of her daughters, yet her sons also claim their part of instruction and improvement at her hands; forasmuch as they remain some years entirely under her tuition; and the goodness of their mind and manners depends mainly upon the first impressions they receive; upon the first formation of them to knowledge, and virtue, and piety.

And however mothers may in these ages be thought unequal to such a task, they were not anciently so esteemed of, but were remarkably successful in the education of some of the greatest men of antiquity. Thus it is well known, that Cornelia the mother of the Gracchi, and Aurelia the mother of Cæsar, had a principal hand in forming those men, who were the glory of their age; and we have yet left an excellent lecture to king Lemuel, (with good reason believed to be Solomon,) which his mother taught him.

Indeed the case is now in a good measure altered, from the present course of education, which (as it respects the better sort) depends mainly upon a knowledge and a mastery in the learned languages, which women do not ordinarily attain to; but then, on the other hand, it ought to be remembered, that virtue and good sense are to be learnt in every language. And forasmuch as morality and religion are now much better understood than they were in the heathen world, the instruction of children, in all the important duties of life, is now a work of much less difficulty than it antiently was.

And that mothers may be the better enabled to go through with this great task of education, it is absolutely necessary, as I before observed, that they be

perfectly well acquainted with the holy scriptures, so as to be able to apply all the precepts of them to all the duties in life; to every purpose, and every occasion that shall offer; and also to be well versed in the most useful and approved treatises that have been published upon the subject of education; such as those of Mr. Locke and the Archbishop of Cambray. And this is the true way for all mothers to entitle themselves to that real veneration and sincere esteem from their children, and from their husbands, which completes the glorious character of Solomon's virtuous wife so often mentioned, *Her children arise up, and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praiseth her.*

And thus having gone through the several branches of that assistance the wife owes to her husband, in order to make her an useful and agreeable help-meet for him, I now proceed to the last instance of duty she owes her husband, to wit, obedience.

Man and woman were at first created perfectly equal. For although there are some passages in St. Paul's epistles which imply a superior dignity in the man, yet are there none that infer a superior authority, or right of dominion, on his part, before the fall. And indeed, when Adam and Eve were yet in their innocence; when their understandings were clear, and their wills upright; when their interest and inclinations were in all respects the same; and pride and vanity had introduced no competition of superiority between them; there was not the least need of giving either of them power and authority over the other; because the greatest pleasure either of them could be capable of, in that condition, was to do every thing that they knew would be most acceptable to the other; and consequently there was no need of power, or command, or force, to oblige either of them to do what either of them desired. But when the woman sinned, through a vain desire of knowledge, and possibly from a vain hope of being superior to her husband, in the only point that gave him pre-eminence over her, it pleased God to punish that vanity in a disappointment of the very end it aimed at; and to make that very desire of pre-eminence a reason of subjection: decreeing, that from thenceforward her desires should be referred

ferred to the will and pleasure of her husband, either to reject or comply with them, as he thought fit. As you may read, (Gen. iii. 16.) *And thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee.*

And indeed the same desire of pre-eminence is, for the most part, the cause of their subjection to this day. There are few women of tolerable discretion, that might not entirely preside in their families, or at least be perfectly at ease, under the government of their husbands, if they did not too apparently affect to rule. And this, as it is exceedingly imprudent, and the occasion of almost all the disquiets that distract the married state, so is it, in truth, immoral and irreligious; since they are expressly commanded in the scriptures to submit and be obedient to their husbands; as you may read, (Eph. v. 22. &c.) *Wives submit yourselves unto your own husbands as unto the Lord; for the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church; and he is the saviour of the body.* That is, as Christ and the church make one mystical body, of which Christ is the head; so man and wife make one body, of which the man is the head: and as Christ is the Saviour of the church, so likewise is the husband given to the wife, to be a saviour to her; to maintain, and protect, and defend her, and by his superior prudence to provide for her well-being; and to conduct her in every instance of discretion and duty. But then, as the head hath no interest of its own, distinct from the rest of the body, nor any advantage over the other parts, unless the care of directing and providing for them be deemed an advantage; so hath the husband no true interest separate from the wife, nor any advantage from his superiority, but the care and trouble that attends it. And therefore neither hath he any reason to pride himself upon his power, nor she to repine for her subjection; since a condition of subjection to a wise and good government, is, beyond all question, the happiest condition in life; and a lawless licentiousness would but put us into the power of every passion and every folly, to hurry or seduce us to destruction. And I must insist upon it, that it is in the power of most women, by prudence, gentleness, and sweetness of temper, to make the authority of their

husbands a source of ease and happiness to both.

From hence it follows, that, as the authority of the husband is a rational authority, devolved upon him by God, for the direction, and preservation, and well-being of the wife; it should never be exercised but with that view, and that in an humane and rational manner: consequently, blind tyranny and brutal force should be banished the society of reasonable creatures, and is contradictory to the very nature and end of the marriage-union. *So ought men to love their wives, saith St. Paul, (Eph. v.) as their own bodies. He that loveth his wife, loveth himself: for no man ever yet hated his own flesh, but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the church.* Dominion was given to man, not for oppression and abuse, but for preservation and protection; on account of his superior wisdom and prudence. Let these then be the reasons and measures of his rule; otherwise he defeats the ends of his dominion, and at the same time degrades himself from the dignity of his nature, and declares himself unworthy of the prerogative he is possessed of. And therefore St. Peter (1 Ep. iii.) directs the husband, *to dwell with the wife according to knowledge, giving honour to the wife, as unto the weaker vessel.* That is, making that superiority which God hath given you, a reason, not of insolence and abuse, but of humanity, and tenderness, and conjugal affection.

And Plutarch very beautifully to this purpose tells us, that husbands ought to preside over their wives, not with the same despotic power wherewith men dispose of their possessions, but with such a kindly sway as the soul rules the body; sympathizing, and, as it were, growing into one with it; united by all the ties of tenderness and affection. And since the dominion of the man seems to have been originally founded, by the divine appointment, in his superiority of wisdom; if his heart be set upon supporting his authority, his first care should be to support that superiority of wisdom upon which it is best founded. Wisdom is a natural claim to dominion, and wherever that is, authority and rule will wait upon it, especially when kindness and good-nature are added to it; for then it is irresistible; nay in truth, kindness is often-

often times in itself, more powerful to the attainment of all our desires, than the utmost stretch of power can be. And this is finely illustrated in the fable of the sun and the north wind: a contest arose between these two powers, which of them should soonest oblige a countryman to throw off his loose coat. Boreas began, and storming with all his force, tumbled and tost the coat about the poor man's ears, but to no purpose; for the stronger he blew, the stronger the clown held, and the closer he wrapt his coat about him. When the wind was weary, the sun began, and played his cheerful beams upon him so successfully, that he soon melted him down into a kindly warmth, that made his coat not only useless, but troublesome to him; and so he quickly threw it off.

The fable is well known, and the moral of it obvious; and I would earnestly recommend it to all married men and women, to remember, that when storming and raging are ineffectual to gain their ends, kindness and good-nature will seldom or never fail of success.

And thus I have gone through the several duties of the married state.

The duties on the man's part, I told you, were love, fidelity, and support; but above all, fidelity, forasmuch as infidelity, for the most part, destroys the other two duties, and is the common cause of poverty, as well as contention and hatred. And therefore it is, that Solomon (Prov. v.) advises to remove far from the strange woman, lest strangers be filled with thy wealth, and thy labours be in the house of a stranger; and thou mourn at the last, when thy flesh and thy body are consumed; and say, how have I hated instruction, and my heart despised reproof, and have not obeyed the voice of my teachers, nor inclined mine ears to him that instructed me! and soon after he adds, drink waters out of thine own cistern; let thy fountain be blessed, and rejoice with the wife of thy youth; let her be as the loving hind, and pleasant roe; let her breast satisfy thee at all times, and be thou ravished always with her love. And why wilt thou, my son, be ravished with a strange woman, and embrace the bosom of a stranger? for the ways of man are before the eyes of the Lord, and he pondereth all his goings; his own iniquities shall take the wicked himself, and he shall be laden with the cords of his own sin. Remember the

apostle's admonition. Remember, that as the wife hath no power over her own body, but the husband, so likewise the husband hath no power over his own body, but the wife. Nay, although your wives had not any power over your bodies, yet would you have no right to abuse and prostitute them to the purposes of vice. What, know ye not, that your bodies are the members of Christ? will ye then take the members of Christ, and make them the members of an harlot? God forbid. What, know ye not, that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost, which is in you, which you have of God; and ye are not your own, for ye are bought with a price? Therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's.

On the other hand, let the woman always remember, not only to be faithful to her husband, but agreeable, and observant; not querulous, not contentious; diligent in the care of her family, and the education of her children in the nurture and fear of the Lord; for this is the woman's justest and highest praise, both in the sight of God and man! Whose adorning, let it not be that outward adorning of plaiting the hair, and wearing of gold, and putting on gorgeous apparel; but let it be the hidden man of the heart, in that which is not corruptible, even the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which in the sight of God is of great price: despising the shewy outside of things, the paltry, the perishing vanities of this world; and being clothed upon in their stead, with the silent, the lasting, the invaluable ornaments of modesty, and humility, and piety, which are of eternal excellency! ornaments of irresistible charms, even in the eyes of men, as well as inestimable value in the sight of God.

And now, my brethren, if ye know these things, happy are ye, if ye do them. And surely ye would do them, if ye knew your own happiness. Brethren, how good and joyful a thing it is to dwell together in unity! to dwell together in an entire union of affection and interest; and in a perfect harmony both of heart and soul! forbearing one another in love, and keeping the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace; well knowing, that ye are tied down to an entire and perfect union, by all the natural engagements, and by all the moral and christian bonds, that can be imagined. And as your temporal

ral interests are one, so also are your eternal. As ye are one body, so likewise are ye of one spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; ye have one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.

To whom, in the union of the glorious and ever-blessed Trinity, be all majesty, and power, and praise, for evermore.

S E R M O N CXXI.

The Duty of Parents to their Children.

PROV. xxii. 6.

Train up a child in the way he should go; and when he is old he will not depart from it.

ALL the wise men in the world agree, that the first impressions made upon us, in our tender years, sink the deepest, and last the longest. And therefore Solomon well directeth, that children should be carefully taught, as soon as they are capable of instruction, all those principles and duties which we would desire to have them practise throughout the whole course of their lives. If good precepts and principles are early impressed and fixed, they will be so many lights set up in the minds of children, to direct their conduct through this maze of life; to guide them in the ways of virtue and truth, and in the paths that lead to everlasting happiness. And although the giddiness of youth, and the blind impulse of unruly passions, should sometimes drive them out of their course; yet as soon as this tumult and infatuation is over, and the mind calmed to the dictates of reason, they will again return into the way they should go; and when they are old, they will not depart from it.

From these words, thus explained, I shall make it the business of this, and some following discourses, to lay down the duty of parents to their children, in all its parts: and this I shall endeavour to do, in the illustration and proof of the following propositions:

First, Parents are to take care of the health and constitution of their children.

Secondly, They are to give them good instruction.

Thirdly, They are to correct them in their faults.

Fourthly, They are to shew them good examples.

Fifthly, They are to make a proper provision for them, as far as they are able.

And, lastly, They are to pray to God for them.

First, Parents are to take care of the health and constitution of their children.

And this care should begin earlier, and extend further, than is commonly imagined.

It is a constant care in the culture of trees, to have a strict regard to the goodness and health of the stock you plant from; because such as the stock is, such will the cyon be; and the prudent husbandman exerts the same care, in relation to all the creatures, whose increase he is concerned in; and would count it strange stupidity to breed from beasts that were either diseased or vicious; and with great reason; because such as the fire or dam is, such, in all probability, will the issue be. And, if men be so much, and so justly concerned for the fruits of their trees, and the offspring of their brutes; can it be a question, whether they should be much more concerned for their own? especially as it is of far worse consequence to bring a vicious man into the world, than a bad apple, or a vicious horse. And therefore all persons that intend to marry, should take particular care both of their body and their mind, to form both in such a manner, as that neither should be a source of evil to the world; they should, above all things, take care not to become the founders of a vicious and an infected race. For this reason they are to take care to strengthen their bodies by temperance and exercise, and to abstain from all excess in eating and drinking, by which their health and strength may be impaired. And, above all, they are carefully to abstain from that vice, so common and so fatal to youth, for whose punishment God Almighty hath, in signal judgment, appointed so severe and dreadful a distemper; a distemper of such distinguished malignity, and inveterate infection, that it descendeth to late posterity; and is one of the chief, among those remarkable methods, by which *GOD visiteth the sins of the fathers upon the children, to the third and fourth generation.*

And as the body is to be disciplined to health and strength by temperance and exercise; so likewise should the mind

mind be disciplined to knowledge and religion, by proper information and instruction, and by the practice of every virtue. Good habits should be acquired, and vicious habits removed and rooted up, with all possible diligence, before men become parents; that they may not derive the guilt upon themselves, of having filled the world with a race of fiends and monsters; nor the curse upon their posterity of having evil constitutions and evil habits conveyed to them with their very being; such habits as may make them very miserable in this world, and lead them to everlasting misery in the world to come! forasmuch as it is well known, that the dispositions of the mind, like the features of the body, are conveyed down from father to son, and, as the common observation is, run in the blood; and therefore the first duty that parents owe their children, is to convey health, and strength, and a good constitution of body and mind to them, as far as it is in their power so to do, by a proper care of their own health, and a conscientious abstinence from all excess and vice of every kind.

And when that is done, the next care they owe their children, is to provide for their health and strength, by proper nourishment.

The parents are not to think they have done enough, in bringing their children into the world in as good a condition as they could. That, although not the least, is however but the first part of their duty. The next is, to support the good constitution they have brought into the world, by proper nourishment, and care of their health. And to this purpose God Almighty hath impressed a strong instinct of love and tenderness for their young, upon all the creatures. And this love is attended with so much delight and complacency in the tender offspring, as is a natural relief and compensation for all the trouble of education, and even for the pains of travail; agreeable to our blessed Saviour's observation, (John, xvi. 21.) *A woman, when she is in travail, hath sorrow, because her hour is come; but as soon as she is delivered of the child, she remembereth no more the anguish, for joy that a man is born into the world.* And that women may have wherewithal to cherish this joy in their hearts, and to support these tender objects

of their love with delight, God Almighty hath furnished them with breasts, filled with the most proper food in the world, for the nourishment of their young; and hath annexed a very uncommon degree of pleasure to the administration of it, and as uncommon a degree of pain and danger, to the with-holding of it from the poor infant; so that this is as plainly a law of nature to all mothers, to suckle their own children, as it is possible to conceive any law to be attended with immediate rewards and punishments, as it is obeyed or transgressed.

As to the rewards that attend the observance of this law of nature, possibly few women that hear me, know any thing of that matter; as having never tried the natural pleasure there is in administering the breast to their own helpless infants; unless perhaps their physicians might, at some time or other, have prescribed it to them for a cure or recovery. But as to the punishment that attends the with-holding of that nourishment from their issue, I do not doubt but that most mothers that hear me, may be sufficiently acquainted with it; since it is well known, that repelling the milk by art, always occasions fevers, and a variety of other dangerous disorders, which often end in the death, and always in the danger, of the unnatural mothers; and not unfrequently make their lives miserable. And all these evils they endure to avoid the discharge of a delightful duty, which they owe to God, and to their own flesh and blood; and to which they are urged, by an innocent and exquisite natural delight, and by one of the strongest natural instincts in the world; so that we may apply to the women of our age that bitter complaint of Jeremiah, (Lament. iv. 3.) *Even the sea-monsters draw out their breast, they give suck to their young ones: the daughter of my people is become cruel like the ostriches in the wilderness.*

This is one of the effects of that false politeness which hath undone the world. How much better would it become us to imitate the simpler manners of those seemingly rude nations, where all women think themselves indispensably obliged to this duty*, from the highest to the lowest;

* Sympson tells us, in his voyage to the East-Indies, that in the Moluques mothers suckle their own children; and dare do no otherwise, not even the queen; alleging the example of beasts, p. 141.

and think themselves sufficiently authorized in doing so, from the example of the brute world around them! It is true, this duty, as it is attended with much pleasure, so it is also attended with a good deal of care and trouble; but then it is so chiefly to the poor, who are forced to undergo it all themselves; and yet these are almost the only people that discharge it; and even these own, that the pleasure of it greatly exceeds the pain; and it is plain it must be so, both from the goodness of God, and the preservation of the creatures, which must otherwise perish. And this is clearly evidenced from the joy and complacency expressed by the poorest creatures, in the performance of it. And the reason of this is evident; the breast is one of the most nervous and delicate textures of our frame, and wonderfully fitted by the Author of our being, for those fine sensations which the soft and tender infant-organs are as well fitted to produce; the natural consequence of which is, love, joy, and complacency in the instrument of that innocent happiness; and love makes toil not only tolerable, but delightful: and, if women of better condition would but once suffer themselves to be governed in this point, by the dictates of their duty, I am satisfied, that to them it would be doubly delightful! inasmuch as they could easily be relieved by the assistance of servants, from every thing offensive and vexatious in that parental office: and then, nothing would remain in the discharge of it, besides the natural pleasure that attends it: and this, without any regard to the joys of a good conscience, would be abundantly its own reward. Or, say it were not, where is there any duty in life, that is not attended with some uneasiness? and if that could excuse from the discharge of it, there would be no such thing as virtue in the world: merit and demerit, praise and dispraise, would be taken away from the earth! and then idleness and industry, courage and cowardice, would be reduced to one value; and temperance and chastity would be placed upon the same level with dissipation and drunkenness. And therefore if women have any regard to the discharge of duty, in a point of so great consequence, both to their own health and happiness, as well as to the health and happiness of their children, and the

good of mankind; they are, in the ordinary course of things, indispensably obliged to nurse their own children at their own breasts, if they are fitted so to do, and their health will allow it. And how much more rational and eligible is this, than to expose them (as is now the common practice) to the neglect and cruelty, to the vices and distempers, of mercenary women, who have no regard to them, from any other tie but that of interest! And, so far as they often find their account in the death of the infant, more than in its life and health, there is no question, but the prospect of those perquisites which attend a new nursing, often tempts them to many inhumane methods of getting rid of the incumbrance of one infant, to make way for another they expect more advantage from. And, on the other hand, if they find their account in the life of the present child, (as, God knows, their whole subsistence often depends upon it,) then are they too much tempted, never to let him die; I mean, to impose another upon you, when he doth. And, by this means, the spurious issue of idlers and vagrants, the dregs of stews and brothels, are substituted in the place of your own legitimate offspring, and divide the inheritance with the brethren; or perhaps come single, and alone, into the enjoyment of all that fortune, which you have toiled out your lives to gain; it may be, to the loss of your own souls. And, no question, but this is often the case, when the apparent children of good men, and good women, who have been well principled, and carefully educated, in the fear of God, betray such profligate, perverse, abandoned dispositions, as are no way to be accounted for, upon any natural principles, other than their being the secret issue of other parents, from whom they have derived the hidden seeds of so much villany and corruption.

To all this may be added another motive of great importance to all mothers; the early engaging the tender affections of their issue in their favour, which is perhaps the best security of their duty. It is well known, that nursing hath a natural tendency, and (if either are not very abandoned) must, in some measure, create a mutual endearment between parents and their children, now too little seen in the world. Children are generally

rally observed to retain an uncommon affection for such nurses as have treated them well, until they are laughed out of it; nor is it altogether without reason, that, in some countries, the being nursed upon the same breast, is thought a natural foundation of relation.

And thus much for the duty of mothers, in providing for the health and strength of their children by proper nourishment. I now proceed to the duty of the father; for neither is he exempt from his portion of the parental care, in this point, since it is equally his concern; and, therefore, as the immediate administration of nourishment is incumbent on the mother, it is the duty of the father to make a sufficient provision for her support in the administration of it; and, by all possible marks and methods of tenderness and good-nature, to relieve, and make her as happy as he can, in this most important article of the conjugal care. And this is no more than what instinct inspireth many of the inferior creatures to do. And, if naturalists rightly inform us, it is to this we chiefly owe all that harmony that fills our fields, and our groves, at the approach of spring; God Almighty having so appointed it, that the toil of incubation should be relieved by sprightly music; that, whilst the hen sits upon the eggs, she should be relieved under that painful and tedious confinement, by the songs of her mate; and where the male is not endowed with a power of relieving her toil in this delightful manner, then we are assured, he divides it with her; and is frequently seen to force her from the nest, that he may succeed to his portion of the trouble.

And, besides all this, where the care of incubation will not suffer the female to take her usual range in search of food, her mate takes care not only to provide it seasonably for her, but also to administer it in the tenderest manner. And, surely, what instinct inspireth the lower creatures to act, in a point so necessary to their preservation, reason, good-nature, and affection should yet more strongly direct, in beings who boast of higher endowments, and superior excellence.

And thus much for the duty of parents, in providing for the health and good constitution of their children.

S E R M O N CXXII.

The same Subject continued.

PROV. xxii. 6.

Train up a child in the way he should go; and when he is old he will not depart from it.

THE next duty that parents owe their children, is, to give them good instruction.

The care of the body, however important, is yet but a lower concern. It is true, as it is the instrument of the soul, care should be taken to make it as usefully subservient to it, in its operations, as is possible. And, forasmuch as this is not to be done without health and a good habit, therefore we owe the same care to the body on these accounts, that a musician doth to his instrument; because if that be neglected, if it be either broken or abused, or if the strings be of an undue tone or texture, it will never answer the ends of his art, but will often send forth a disagreeable discord, instead of a delightful harmony.—For this reason, the first and great care in life should be, to join a sound mind to a sound body; and to preserve both in their perfection. Now, forasmuch as the mind is believed, by many wise men, to come into the world a perfect blank, free from all characters of good or evil, and capable of any; and, forasmuch as knowledge and virtue are its health and strength, therefore the first duty in life is to impress right notions and good principles upon it in the beginning; and for this reason, you are first to impress a strong awe of Almighty God upon the minds of your children; of that God who made all things in heaven and in earth, by the word of his mouth, and can destroy them again at his pleasure; of that God who knoweth the secrets of our hearts, and seeth the thoughts afar off; and there is not a motion in our minds that is hid from him, but he will punish all evil thoughts, as well as evil actions, with dreadful vengeance! and, on the contrary, will reward every act and every intention of virtue, with excess of happiness! And when your children know all this, your next care is to teach them, as far as they are capable of learning, what virtue and goodness are; and on the contrary, what those wicked actions are which offend God, and provoke his

wrath against us; and then inspire them by all possible methods, with the love of the one, and the abhorrence of the other. The virtues which they are first to be taught, are, to love, and do all good offices to all around them; to pity the miseries and misfortunes of all they see in affliction, and to be charitable to the poor. And all this most children are capable of learning, even before they can speak; whereas the contrary to this is the practice of most parents, or at least, of those to whose care they commit their children. Wrath, revenge, and cruelty are the first passions children are taught to exert; if they fall, the ground is to be beaten in revenge; if any one offend them, they are taught to stamp and clinch their fists, and roar out some expressions, even of inarticulate rage, against them; if birds, or other poor creatures are brought to them, to divert them, they are to be abused and killed. And thus, instead of being early instructed in meekness and compassion, in humanity and good-nature, they are taught resentment, and wrath, and cruelty, in their very cradles. Vices which, in all probability, the best instruction in the world will never be able to unteach them thoroughly, for the rest of their lives; and so they become monsters of oppression and inhumanity to all they deal with.

The sentence of the Areopagus, one of the wisest assemblies of Greece, or of the world, is well worth our attention on this head; they condemned and passed a severe sentence upon a child, who diverted himself with putting out the eyes of quails; considering that action as a mark of a most detestable disposition, which, if it were suffered to grow up with impunity, would be pernicious to a great number of people.

The next virtue that children are to be taught is, veracity; that is, to tell the truth upon all occasions: and this is a virtue in which they will be more easily instructed, because it is a virtue to which all children are naturally disposed, and from which most of them are warped with difficulty. And to confirm them in this disposition, they are to know, that this is a virtue which God Almighty hath a peculiar regard for; that he delighteth to be called the God of truth; that mercy and truth are his great attributes! that none shall abide in his tabernacle, none

shall dwell in his holy hill, but he that speaketh the truth from his heart. On the other hand, they are to be taught the utmost dread and abhorrence of a lie; that the devil is a liar, and the author of it; but that God Almighty hateth and detesteth it; that he hath declared by the mouth of Solomon, that *lying lips are an abomination unto the Lord*; and that *he that speaketh lies shall not escape*. And whereas most lies are told to hide faults, every fault that is confessed with ingenuity, and sorrow for having committed it, should be forgiven; but a lie should never be forgiven, but corrected with double chastisement, and for this plain reason, because it doubles every fault that is committed, by adding known falsehood to it. This, I say, is what children should be taught; but the very contrary to this is too often what they are taught. They are threatened and flattered into falsehood, as soon as they are capable of being guilty of it. And almost the first sentence a child learns, after he can speak, is a lying excuse for his nurse, or his servant. If he fall or be hurt by their negligence, he is to deny it to death. If they have given him any food that makes him sick, he is to deny it steadfastly, although the lie should cost him his life. I believe there are few that hear me, who have not known several, and heard of many more instances of children, who have lost their limbs, and been cripples all their life long, by this corruption of their attendants. But how many thousands have lost their lives in this manner, is impossible to say. And indeed, if they only lost their limbs and their lives, the evil would be in some degree tolerable; whereas this early habit of lying depraves the mind beyond any other whatsoever! and betrays children into so much impudence and effrontery, as makes them hardened to every virtue, and obstinate in every vice; and of consequence must end, too often, in their eternal ruin.

To this we owe that steadfastness in falsehood, conspicuous in the characters of some men; men that allow themselves in the vilest and most villanous falsehoods, that can any way contribute to increase their gain, or hide their guilt; to mask and disguise their hypocrisy, and raise the reputation of their righteousness! and though they should be instantly detected, and exposed even to numerous assemblies,

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this makes no change in their conduct; for the hypocrite's whole life is one continued lie; you may confute, but you cannot confound him. They receive your correction with such a placid composure, with such a meekness and humility in hypocrisy, that you can scarce believe your senses to their disadvantage: how is it possible such meek, such disinterested, such sanctified men, should be villains? and indeed, it would be hard to account for it, were we not informed by the spirit of God, that the great father of lies can, upon occasion, transform himself into an angel of light.

Another duty which children should be early taught, and which perhaps will be the best guardian of their veracity, and every other virtue, is an awful regard and high veneration for the name and honour of God! for this will establish a high sense of the divine power and majesty in the minds of children, when they understand that his name is not to be mentioned but with awe and reverence. And yet, God knows, the direct contrary to this is the practice of the world; and the very first words children are often taught to pronounce, is some profanation of the name of God, in a curse or an oath.

The fear of the Lord (saith Solomon) *is the beginning of wisdom*: children are influenced into duty by the impressions of fear, even before the use of reason; and therefore, the fear of God should be inculcated as early and as deeply as possible; as the surest means to inspire them with caution and consideration, which are the sure foundations of wisdom and virtue, and the best guardians against error and impiety; whereas, when children have got early habits of profaning the name of God, they immediately lose all sense of fear towards him; and with that, all sense of religion and virtue! and so become utterly profligate, and abandoned to all vice and villainy! insomuch that I believe, there scarcely ever was one instance of any child, who was early allowed to curse and swear, that ever became a good man, to the last day of his life.

The next virtue in which I would have children instructed, is humility. The virtue which, of all others, will best prepare them for all the cross accidents and calamities they are sure to meet with in life, will give them the truest sense of

their own corruption, and weakness, and vanity; and of consequence, will dispose them to contentment and resignation, under all the dispensations and chastisements of the divine providence. And this is a virtue, which the modesty of their tender years will incline and enable them to practise with ease; whereas, in the common course of education, they are carefully initiated into the contrary vice, and are taught pride with as much diligence as if it were the most important duty in life; and, as if the delay of so excellent an institution were of dangerous consequence, they take care to begin with it betimes, and instruct them in it as soon as they are capable of discerning their own figure in the glass; and then is the imagination of the poor young creature bewildered with all the gaieties that vanity can invent: laces, ribbons, feathers, fineries, and fopperies of all kinds and colours are crowded together to adorn the tender clay; and the imagination of one, if not both parents, is stretched, to dispose and vary all these to advantage, that the poor little pageant may, by all means, be early taught to set a right value upon its person; and to distinguish itself from other children, whose parents have less fortune or foppery than its own. The consequence from all this is, that so fine a creature cannot bear to go into a cold dirty school, or mix with a herd of tattered children; and so is kept at home, for fear of spoiling its fine clothes, or its fine complexion. And by this means, its little head is in a very little time so entirely filled with such fine ideas of dress, and fashion, and vanity, that there is no room left for any thing good or useful ever after. If the child be of the other sex, it is odds, but she is committed, perhaps trusted entirely, to the care of an ignorant and fantastic servant; who, if she hath the good fortune to be born a foreigner, is from that sole advantage, without the recommendation of any one useful talent in life, too often thought qualified to educate children of the highest condition; and will take special care never to spoil the fine eyes of her pupil, either with work or reading; never to molest her mind either with the low troublesome knowledge of family-affairs, or with the severities of religion and virtue; will teach her to speak a foreign language with great ease and volubility, perhaps

without knowing how to read her own; and, what is infinitely worse, will be too apt to unteach her the awkward unfashionable virtues of modesty and reserve; will let her understand, that blushing is the highest crime she can be guilty of; and that she ought to be ashamed of nothing, but being out of countenance, or out of fashion; in a word, will make her a complete, perhaps a perverted woman, before she knows what it is to be a child.

If the child happen to be of the male kind, it is odds, but a French tutor will do as much by him. I would here by no means be understood to mean any reflection upon that great nation, which hath produced so many men of eminence in every branch of useful knowledge. I censure nothing but our own folly, in too often choosing the meanest of that nation, for the most important office in life, the education of our children. These are men who, from their skill in outward ornaments, are too often absurdly chosen, to infuse inward accomplishments; men who will carry their pupils by a short road through coffee-houses, play-houses, and assemblies, into what they call the knowledge of the world; without passing through the tedious round of old and obsolete books and languages, and the severe discipline of study; and without incumbering their fine heads with the lumber and pedantry of arts and sciences. Such is that detestable education, by which many of the best fortunes and families among us are too early corrupted and cramped, to the reproach and calamity of their country! Men well known, and sufficiently distinguished in all places of public resort, except the church, the senate, and the courts of justice; for in the first of these they are rarely seen, at least to any good purpose, and in the rest as rarely heard. And although some, by the force of a better genius, and the influence of the divine grace, may break through the prejudices of so unhappy an education, yet these are but few and rare, in comparison of the mighty numbers that are utterly undone by it.

Another virtue that should be early and carefully taught children, is justice; and that equity and honesty in our dealings, which is prescribed by this virtue, is so very agreeable to the first rudiments of reason, that children are very early

capable of it. And to give them a high veneration for this virtue, (which is the shield of right, and the bond of peace,) they are to be taught that it is of high value in the sight of God; that justice and judgment are the habitation of his throne; and that he hath in his holy word promised great and lasting blessings upon those that practise this virtue from the heart. That God blesteth the habitation of the just; that they are under his immediate care and protection; that he hath promised that no evil shall happen unto them; and that he will deliver them from trouble.

On the other hand, they are to be inspired with the utmost detestation and abhorrence of all fraud and iniquity in their dealings. They are to be taught, that every degree of these vices are marks of the meanest and basest minds! that there is as much villainy in defrauding a school-fellow of a taw or a trifle, as in robbing him of any thing of greater value; for if a child be allowed to do injustice in a trifle, he will be much more tempted to it when he can gain considerably by it. And therefore he is to be taught, that this is a vice which will render him despicable, as well as hateful, in the eyes of the world; and doubly odious in the sight of God; that false weights and false measures are an abomination to him; that if any man defraud his brother, God hath declared himself an avenger of all such; that he hath declared, that neither *thieves, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God*. Your children are to be early and carefully taught, that nothing under heaven can justify any degree of fraud or iniquity in our dealings! that no pretence, even of good intentions or pious purposes whatsoever, can sanctify wicked means; that we must by no means do evil, that good may come; and that the spirit of God hath expressly declared of all that do so, by the mouth of his holy apostle, that their *damnation is just*. That God himself hath declared by the mouth of his prophet Isaiah (lxi. 8.), that *he hateth robbery, though it were for a burnt-offering*. And, above all, they should be carefully taught, that of all robberies, they are the most heinous, the most hateful, the most abhorred of God, who have the spoils of the widow and the orphan for their object. The helpless orphan, the sickly, the aged, the desolated

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lated widow: O Lord, righteous and just, how just are thy judgments, which thou hath pronounced against their oppressors in thy holy writ! *Oppress not the widow, nor the fatherless, nor the poor,* saith Zechariah (vii. 10.). And he observeth of all that do so, that *they made their hearts as an adamant-stone, lest they should hear the law, and the words which the Lord of Hosts hath sent in his spirit by the former prophets.* Therefore came a great wrath from the Lord of Hosts; therefore it came to pass, that as he cried, and they would not hear; so they cried, and I would not hear, saith the Lord of Hosts.

Wo to thee that spoilest, and thou wast not spoiled (saith Isaiah, xxxiii. 1.); *and dealest cruelly, and they dealt not treacherously thee.* Rob not the poor (saith Solomon, in the xxiid chapter of his Proverbs, Rob not the poor) because he is poor; neither oppress the afflicted in the gate: for the Lord will plead their cause, and spoil the soul of those that spoiled them.

God, of his infinite mercy, deliver this audience from this guilt, and from the vengeance due to it; through the merits and mediation of Jesus Christ.

S E R M O N CXXIII.

The same Subject continued.

PROV. xxii. 6.

Train up a child in the way he should go; and when he is old he will not depart from it.

In a former discourse upon these words, I proposed to consider the duty of parents to their children, in the following order:

First, That parents are obliged to take care of the health and constitution of their children.

Secondly, That they are to give them good instruction.

Thirdly, That they are to correct them in their faults.

Fourthly, That they are to shew them good example.

Fifthly, They are to make a proper provision for them, as far as they are able.

And, lastly, They are to pray to God for them.

Under the first of these heads, I shewed it to be the previous duty of all persons that entered into the married state, to take care that their constitutions were not impaired by intemperance, or excess, or vice of any kind; nor their minds in-

fectured with evil habits; inasmuch as evil dispositions are found, by experience, to be propagated as well as evil constitutions; and although it be a reflection of sufficient dread and disquiet, to be the author of a miserable infected race of wretched mortals; yet it is infinitely more so, deliberately to diffuse vice and villainy among mankind, and entail them upon late posterity; to be the founder of a race of fiends.

In the next place, I shewed it to be the indispensable duty of mothers to nurse their own children, if their health and constitution will allow it; that this is indisputably a law of nature, and, as such, guarded with evident and sufficient sanctions; the observance of it attended with the reward of signal pleasure and happiness to the parent, and the transgression of it, with dangers and punishments of various kinds.

The next duty of parents, which I considered in my last discourse, was, that of giving their children good instructions; and the first part of this duty, I told you, was to give them early and strong impressions of the awe and veneration of that great Being, that made heaven and earth; that searcheth the secrets of the heart, and seeth the thoughts afar off; the Almighty Author of sure and unerring vengeance to the wicked, and infinite and unspeakable rewards to the righteous! and then, gradually to explain and inculcate the several virtues that will entitle them to his favour; and inspire the utmost abhorrence of those vices that will draw down his vengeance upon them.

The chief of these virtues, I told you, were mercy, humility, truth, and justice; which are the nobler and more immediate transcripts of his own perfections; the great guardians of peace upon earth, and good-will towards men! and, under some of these heads, I shewed you the pernicious practice of parents and servants, in early initiating, and carefully instructing children in many of the contrary vices; wrath, revenge, cruelty, pride, lying, and profaning the name of God, in unhallowed oaths and curses.

I concluded with an earnest exhortation to parents, early and carefully to instruct and exercise their children in the principles and in the practice of justice, which is the shield of right, and the bond of peace; to teach them that nothing under heaven

heaven can justify any fraud or iniquity in our dealings; that no pretence of good intentions, or pious purposes, whatsoever, can sanctify wicked means.

Having thus considered the principal virtues in which children are early to be instructed, I now proceed to consider those, which may, I think, be properly called secondary or ministerial virtues, as being subservient to virtues of greater consequence, and higher excellence than themselves; and the chief of these are temperance, obedience, modesty, civility, and industry.

As to the first of these, I am well aware that temperance is, and hath ever been, accounted a cardinal virtue; nor is it any part of my intention to debase its dignity; but only to observe, that as it is subservient to higher purposes than bare abstinence from excess; and is indeed necessary to the exercise of every other virtue; therefore I think it may not improperly be termed ministerial: and it is certain, that wise men have ever esteemed temperance so necessary both to health and virtue, that some have gone so far, as to enjoin it strictly to the breeding parent; that so the child may come into the world in some measure influenced by this habit, or at least, properly prepared for it. All physicians agree, that the plainest and simplest foods are best fitted to young and tender stomachs, and are attended with less danger of surfeit and excess, and of consequence are more safe and salutary; and all philosophers agree, that temperance is the truest foundation of every virtue and good habit in the mind: and if so, it is evident to common sense, that this foundation cannot be laid too early; and therefore parents cannot be too careful in avoiding all sweetenings and seasonings, all heightenings of taste in their children's food, which cannot fail of having ill effects upon their health, and giving them an early turn to luxury, the inlet of every vice, and every corruption, to which the human nature is prone! luxury, our national reproach and ruin! to which we owe, among infinite other evils, the immeasurable use of that too fashionable and pernicious plant which weakens the stomach, unbraces the nerves, and drains the very vitals of our national wealth; to which nevertheless our children are as early, and as carefully enticed, from the very breast,

as, if the daily use of this liquor were an indispensable duty which they owed to God and their country.

The next ministerial virtue which children should be early taught, is obedience; and it is sufficiently known, that this is always the first duty inculcated by that order of men, which hath hitherto been most eminent for the education of youth. *Children, obey your parents in all things*, saith the apostle; *for this is well pleasing unto the Lord*. And doubtless, nothing can be more agreeable to the God of order, and fountain of all virtue, and all felicity, than this submission of children to their natural superiors and guardians; which is the best early guardian of their health, the best security of their virtue, and source of their happiness; it being evident, that in the ordinary course of things, nothing can be more reasonable, or of greater use to children, than a ready undisputing submission to the will of their parents; they being, from the advantage of more age and experience, better judges of what they ought to do or avoid. And therefore this obedience should have no limitation or reserve, except where the parent is found to command something contrary to the law of God; in that case, and in that only, the child's obedience is to be dispensed with; in all others, to be steadily and uniformly exacted, without admitting the least debate or hesitation; than which nothing can be of worse consequence, either to the peace of the parent, or the virtue and well-being of the child; the same spirit that is resistive to the authority of the parent, will in time be refractory to that of the magistrate, and rebellious even to that of Almighty God; and will at the same time, in all probability, degenerate into an offensive rudeness, or an unsociable fullness to the rest of the world. And therefore parents should subdue this spirit early and effectually, if they expect their children should become good sons, good subjects, or good Christians. And the true way to do this is, by carefully avoiding all cruel, unjust, and wicked commands, and exacting a severe and steady obedience to all others. And these, in a prudent and good parent, must often be such as will shew the child his own interest and happiness, in the obedience he yielded to them; although neither of these, neither his

his interest nor his happiness, should ever by any means be made the rules or measures of his obedience (because there are infinite instances, in which it is impossible he can either discern or judge of them): no, this must be entirely resolved into the parents right of rule; the natural pleasure of a dutiful submission to their authority; and the comfortable assurance of a blessing from Almighty God, upon their cheerful and conscientious obedience*.

Another virtue that parents are carefully to cultivate in their children, is modesty. By modesty I mean, not that outward demureness and artifice of face; that affected guise and phrase of humility, which impudence often assumes, and hypocrisy always: the mask of fraud, and harbinger of deceit! that meek unblushing assurance, which distinguishes the smooth and faintly Pharisee; that smooths his phrase, and humbles his eyes, with all the arts, and to all the purposes of delusion! of whom the Psalmist so justly observes, that *there is no faithfulness in his mouth; their throat is an open sepulchre; they flatter with their tongue.* No; true modesty arises from a true sense of decency and duty, and best shews itself in a becomingness of behaviour, and due deference to the rest of the world, according to their several relations and stations in it; equally removed from fawning and from falsehood: and of this we need say little more, than that it is at once the greatest ornament of youth, and best guardian of virtue. It is that natural check, which it hath pleased God to lay upon every thing, that is either vicious, or unruly, or even indecent in our nature. And of how much value this virtue is in the eyes of Almighty God, is evident from the care which he hath taken of it in the very formation of our frame. The flushing of the blood in the face, upon the consciousness of having violated this virtue, or even upon the least apprehension of being in danger of violating it, is one of the most amazing phenomena among all the wonders of our make: for what is this, in effect, but God Almighty's declaring to us, that we shall never offend against this virtue, without publishing our shame to all around us? what is it,

* On the slave-coast of Guinea, children give and receive nothing from their parents, or elder brothers; nor wives from their husbands, but upon the knee. Bosman, p. 341.

but making every drop of blood in our bodies the guardians of it? and this in a manner, equally astonishing and inexplicable! flashing the blood into the face, by channels that never were found out; and by a power that never was or will be accounted for: and the plain reason why this virtue is so guarded, is of such mighty importance in the sight of God, is this; it is the guardian of every virtue; it is in the mechanism of our frame, what prudence is in our minds, the power that sways, and guides, and governs, all the other virtues. Take away prudence from the mind, and there is no virtue left: take away modesty from our make, and the consequence will, in effect, be the same: this once removed, the mind becomes the easy prey of every passion, every vice, and every evil tendency in our nature. This once removed, every spark of evil, before latent in the soul, blazes out into a flame, and devours all worth and virtue before it: and therefore there is not a more lovely, or more important, office of the parental care, than to be strict and diligent guardians of the modesty of their children; than to keep them at the utmost distance from every thing that hath the least appearance even of indecency, and much more of impudence, impiety, or immorality of any kind. And yet the very contrary to this is too notoriously the practice of many parents; who take a monstrous, or, to speak more properly, a hellish pleasure, in teaching their children the worst words, and most vicious and impudent forms of speech, as soon as they are able to speak.—*Folly* (saith Solomon) *is joy to him that is destitute of wisdom*: and is it possible there can be a greater excess of folly, than for parents thus to delight in the destruction of their own children? This is so shocking a conduct, that it is incapable of aggravation: and therefore I shall only observe of it, that these men act as if they were afraid their children's own natural inclinations, their parents' example, and the corruptions of the world, would all come too late to make them reprobates! to make them ripe for perdition! and therefore they take early pains to establish their guilt, and to insure their damnation betimes.

Another duty parents owe their children is, to teach them that civility, which is commonly known by the name of good

good manners—an accomplishment which introduces youth more early, and to more advantage, into the world, than any other whatsoever; and oftentimes recommends them more effectually to the favour and protection of the great, than many other qualities of more inherent excellence; because it is often the only one by which they can be obliged or served. In one word, it is an easy, a natural, and an universal introduction to the regard of mankind; and if it be supported by real worth, cannot fail to fix us in their esteem.

And this civility, which we call good manners, is a duty founded at once, both in justice and necessity.

No man is self-sufficient, but hath frequent and endless occasions for the assistance and good offices of others; and no man is so strictly tied down by any law either of God or society, to do good offices to others to the full extent of his power, but that he hath at the same time a right to some returns of gratitude and acknowledgment. And in this conduct, in requesting the favours and good offices of others with a becoming deference; in a readiness and cheerfulness to do good offices to others, with a thankfulness for being so employed; and, lastly, in a thankful and ready acknowledgment of all good offices done to ourselves; in these consist the essentials of civility, and what we truly and properly call good manners: the courtly phrase, the courtesy, and the bow, and the friendly salutation, are but its outward garb, indication, and ornament. Let me be understood upon this point, which is, in truth, very little understood in the world. Although every man hath a right, from our natural equality, to a fair unoffending treatment from every other, yet no man hath an absolute right to the aid of others in any exigency; and therefore, when he wants it, he is obliged to sue for it, in a modest phrase, and submissive demeanour; and when he hath received it, he is to return thanks, in a style suitable to the favour received: and, therefore, the man that is void of good manners, is at the same time void both of gratitude and justice; he expects what he hath not a right to; and he pays not what he owes. So that ill manners is in truth a lower kind of immorality; it is injustice and dishonesty in a less degree; and, if it be neglected there, may

soon rise, and become conspicuous in a higher.

Another virtue in which children are to be carefully instructed, and to which they are to be early enured, is patience (which I shall beg leave to consider in this place as a ministerial virtue). Now patience is a virtue, which teaches us to bear evil with equanimity, and humble resignation to the will of God; by whom all events are governed, and without whom not so much as a sparrow falleth to the earth. Forasmuch then as it is well known, that all evils are increased by impatience, and abated by equanimity and resignation; therefore it is obvious at first sight, of what importance the value of patience must be, in a world encompassed with evil.

The instances under which this virtue is to be exercised are endless as the calamities of life; and therefore it cannot be too early, too often, or too earnestly inculcated. However, I shall at present content myself with recommending one small part of it to the consideration of all parents and tutors; and that is, patience of solitude; early to habituate their children and pupils to bear being alone.

The advantages of this habit are obvious, and need barely to be mentioned. First, they will by this means learn to think, to reflect, and converse with their own thoughts and hearts. Secondly, they will soon get the better of those instinctive fears of solitude, which, however wisely impressed, (in aid of that period of life which most needs the protection and care of others,) are too apt to degenerate into timorous superstitions; which impair all the powers of reason, and often make life a load. And, thirdly, it will guard them from those infinite evils which men daily run into, to banish solitude, and kill time; such as evil conversation, and idle pursuits and habits of all kinds. And this, we are told, a wise man of antiquity laid so great a stress upon, that, being asked, what he had gained by his philosophy? he answered, that he had learned to converse at home, and not be beholden to others for good company.

Another duty in which children are early to be instructed and exercised, is industry in some honest and useful occupation; the children of poor parents, in some rudiments or lower branch of some

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useful trade, as the foundation of a future livelihood; and the children of those of better condition, in endowing and adorning their minds with those habits of knowledge and virtue, which will best become their station and condition in the world, and make them a blessing to all below them.

"The whole life (say the Chinese philosophers) depends upon care and industry; the year on the spring; the day on rising early. He who in his youth is not diligent and assiduous in his studies, when old age cometh, will be a fool, and find himself empty-handed; he who in spring will not till, in autumn will not reap."

Early industry is the best security in the world against vicious habits: when this is neglected, men easily become a prey to sloth and idleness; which are the parents of every vice, and the bane of every thing good and excellent.

And here I cannot but take notice of that noble institution of Solon, that great Athenian law-giver, which decreed, that every child that refused or neglected to support his parents, when age or infirmities called for their assistance, should be branded with infamy, and deprived of all the privileges of society; but with this limitation, provided the parents took care to breed up their child to some useful trade or occupation; which if they neglected, their children were then acquitted of all obligation to provide for them in their need.

And thus I have done with that part of the parents duty, which consists in instructing their children, and forming them to those virtues which may be called the lesser morals, but are at the same time the sure guardians of the greater.

SERMON CXXIV.

The same Subject continued.

Prov. xxii. 6.

Train up a child in the way he should go; and when he is old he will not depart from it.

HAVING, in some former discourses, laid before you the several parts of the parents duty to the children, and explained very particularly the several virtues, both primary and ministerial, in which they were to be early instructed and exercised; I now proceed to con-

sider the means necessary to be made use of, in order more effectually to inculcate and confirm those virtues in their hearts.

And, first, all parents are particularly to remember, that as soon as their children have passed through the first rudiments of learning, and are able to read, they should then be carefully taught some short system of the Christian religion, such as that excellent summary of Christian doctrines and duties contained in the Church Catechism; not only to get them by heart, or rather by rote, as the common custom is; but in a rational intelligent way; and, in order to this, the questions and answers should be varied and explained, and the children should be obliged to give the meaning of them in other words; and, at last, to add the proofs from scripture. And this they will be enabled to do, by the help of some short and useful explanation of the catechism, published for that purpose; one particularly, by a late most reverend and excellent prelate, formerly your teacher in this place: but above all, the scriptures are to be read frequently and constantly; those parts especially and primarily, which contain an account of the wonderful works and judgments of God; such as the creation, the deluge, the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, and the deliverance from the Egyptian bondage; and above all, the life and miracles of our Blessed Saviour, and his apostles. For these being in their own nature extraordinary, and at the same time conveyed to us in the noblest, the most instructive, and the most delightful relations this world was ever blessed with, will be read with pleasure, and remembered with ease: and will at the same time give your children strong and awful notions of the infinite power, wisdom, and goodness of God; together with a deep veneration of his justice and judgments upon presumptuous and impenitent sinners: and, in consequence of this, will impress a strong awe and dread of offending and provoking the divine wrath and indignation against us.

After this, they are carefully to peruse and revolve those solemn and devotional parts of the holy scriptures, which set forth, in most moving and exalted strains, the mercy and might, and majesty of Almighty God; such as the psalms of David, the prophecies of Isaiah, and the life, suffering,

suffering, and submission of Job: and, lastly, they are to be well and often instructed and exercised in the Ecclesiastes, and proverbs of Solomon, which contain at once the plainest and the wisest precepts that ever were delivered for the conduct of life, both with regard to this world, and the world to come. These are to be perpetually perused, and perfectly remembered: and by being so, will be a sure and lasting fund of direction, consolation, and support, on all occasions, and throughout all emergencies in life.

And thus I have gone through those fundamental duties of erudition and instruction, which parents owe their children. For the rest, this city hath the advantage of so many excellent schools for their further improvement, as makes it unnecessary to pursue this subject any longer. Only thus much give me leave to observe to you, that as good school-masters are the greatest benefactors to mankind, and the worst rewarded for the good they do, of all mortals; paying an uncommon regard and return to them, for the advantages your children receive from them, as it is your duty, so it is likewise greatly your interest; and the fruits of it will be repaid sevenfold into your own bosom.

I have now considered at large, how your children are to be led gradually through the whole series of Christian and moral duties; and have only to add, that, when they are early and long practised in them, the motions of duty and virtue will then become as easy and as familiar to them, as those of nature: or, to speak more properly, custom will make them nature; and they will practise them with as little difficulty, as they walk or breathe.

The next duty that parents owe their children is, to correct them in their faults. And this is a duty wherein parents, from their great fondness for their children, are often exceedingly faulty: and yet in truth, the neglect of correction is faulty, even upon the score of fondness; for true tenderness and love to children should oblige parents to provide early and carefully, that they might be miserable and afflicted as short and as seldom, and happy as often and as long as possible. And the true way to effect this, is to fix good habits; and either to prevent or to root out evil habits as early as possible.

For this reason, if children are not to be won to goodness by kindness and indulgence, (which I own is much more desirable,) they are to be compelled to it by severity and discipline; and when they have once got a good habit, it will, from that moment, be easy to them. On the other hand, if they are not to be kept back from evil by exhortation and advice, they are to be deterred from it by threats and punishments; for, as naturalists observe of young trees, that stubborn, crooked plants are not to be straightened but by fire; so stubborn, perverse dispositions are often not to be amended but by warm and severe correction; and that from the very beginning. One correction, and that perhaps a light one, will deter a child from doing an ill thing at first; but, if you suffer him to get a habit of doing it, perhaps twenty corrections will not break him of it: so that children are to be early corrected, out of pity and tenderness. For what parent, that loves his child, would not rather correct him for a fault once, than let him go on until he found himself under a necessity of correcting him fifty times for it, and perhaps to no purpose? And therefore Solomon rightly observes, (Prov. xii. 24.) *that he that spareth the rod, hateth his son; but he that loveth him, chasteneth him betimes.* From hence we learn, that parents should correct their children early, even out of love and pity to them. And the same wise man again adviseth, (Prov. xix. 18.) *Chasten thy son while there is hope, and let not thy soul spare for his crying.* That is, chasten him early, while there is hope of his reformation; for if you let him go on in vice, your correction may come too late. Again he tells us, (Prov. xxix. 15.) *The rod and reproof give wisdom; but a child left to himself, bringeth his mother to shame.* The mother is here particularly mentioned, because children are mostly ruined by the false and ill-judged indulgence of the mothers: nay, you ought to correct your children early, as well for your own ease, as for their amendment: for besides the pleasure of seeing your children grow up in goodness and virtue; is it not a great happiness to yourselves to be saved the trouble, and vexation, and disquiet, of giving your children frequent and repeated corrections, when they are grown headstrong in vice? And therefore Solomon again most excellently

excellently adviseth, (ver. 17. of the same chapter,) *Correct thy son, and he shall give thee rest: yea, he shall give delight unto thy soul.*

But, perhaps, the child is weak and sickly, and therefore must not be corrected, for fear of spoiling his constitution. This is the common excuse for ruining all the children in the world; and it is as shameful and ill grounded, as it is common: for the sure way of destroying the best constitution under heaven, is by leaving it at the mercy of peevish and ungovernable dispositions; by making it a prey to all the unruly passions, and humours, and appetites of a perverse mind: and therefore the only way to preserve a weak constitution, is by subduing the froward unruly mind, that tears it to pieces, to the discipline of reason and virtue. Moreover, it should be considered, that if this be not seasonably and effectually done, the diseases and ailments of headstrong children can neither have the aid of proper food or proper physic to relieve them; and therefore all necessary correction is to be early applied, even for the interest of their health and quiet: although in truth, if correction were dangerous to such a constitution, it were infinitely better, that a perverse child should actually die under it, than that he should be suffered to become a son of perdition; to grow up into a monster of vice and iniquity, to plague his parents and the world, and to gather to himself *wrath against the day of wrath, and the revelation of the righteous judgment of God.*

The next duty that parents owe their children, is to set them good example; of which I shall now say no more than this, that your children will always believe, that you think that to be the best which you practise yourselves; because you do it of choice; and if you did not think it best, why should you do it? and therefore, as it will be cruel in you to correct them for those vices which you yourselves not only teach, but tempt them to, by your example; so it will be vain, and impossible for you to reform them by it. For this reason, if you have any regard for their well-being in this world, and their salvation in the next, you will be infinitely careful not to lead them in the paths of perdition; not to guide or go before them in the ways of sin, *which go down to the chambers of death.*

The next duty that parents owe their children, is to make a proper provision for them, as far as they are able: and the Apostle tells us, (1 Tim. v. 8.) that *he is worse than an infidel*, that neglecteth this duty. And the reason of this declaration is evident: this is a duty which even the heathens thought themselves obliged to from the laws of nature; and therefore that Christian that neglects it, is, in that respect, worse than a heathen.

Now by making provision for your children must be understood, such a provision as may enable them, by the help of an honest industry, to become good and useful men in the world; for what can be a more lamentable consideration to parents, than to reflect, that by their idleness and extravagance, they have exposed their helpless issue to misery and contempt, and to all the temptations of poverty and want? But, on the other hand, parents are by no means obliged to provide endlessly for their children, as many of them do: to heap up so much wealth, as may make it needless for their children to be either virtuous or industrious, in order to get a comfortable livelihood, is surely a dangerous provision, and such as never can be a duty. And, certainly, much less are they obliged to provide such fortunes for them as may tempt them to luxury and excess, to vanity and extravagance; because that is providing, not for their support, but for their ruin, both of body and soul.

There is one thing I must recommend to parents, as a point of great importance, to their own as well as to their children's happiness; and that is, in regard to their settling them in the world, in marriage. Many unhappy marriages are laid to the charge of parents, and, I fear, with too much truth. A discreet parent thinks himself obliged to settle his child advantageously; but that is the point wherein they so often fail; for, by advantageously they generally understand, richly and honourably: whereas riches and high rank easily may, and often do, bring many miseries along with them. There ought to be a strict examination of the heart, on such occasions, whether they can appeal to the All-seeing eye for the integrity of their intentions, and whether avarice or ambition may not be more the motives of their conduct, than a reasonable

reasonable prospect of happiness to their issue : for if any degree of these mix with their intentions, it will taint them before God ; and naturally tends to the mutual misery both of the parent and of the child.

Many things ought to be carefully considered, before such an union is completed. And as perfect obedience is required of the children, parents should be very cautious in their commands ; and impose nothing upon them (particularly in relation to marriage) but with a proper regard to their true interest and happiness ; which is not possible to be attained in the conjugal state, without true worth and virtue in the associate ; which are not always the attendants of wealth and honour. And even where these excellencies are attended with those temporal advantages, the parents' choice is to be urged with the utmost tenderness and indulgence ; inasmuch as there may be latent and well-grounded dislikes, which (too often) children can neither conquer nor explain.

When this is done, then, whatever may happen from the parents' misapprehension of things, they will have a clear conscience, and no room to reproach themselves ; nor can they justly be reproached.

There are some parents such tyrants, that all the world must condemn them. I do not speak to them, for I fear they are incorrigible, and I hope their number is small ; but I address myself to those who appear more reasonable ; but although they act with less appearance of violence, may be as guilty ; and by insinuations and artful address prevail over fearful and modest minds, and obtain a consent, when they have not courage or assurance enough to resist or contend on such an occasion. This has been the unhappy case of many a young woman ; and is, in effect, as cruel a case as can be well imagined ; inasmuch as it frequently turns the humble and dutiful disposition of children into their destruction.

The last duty that parents owe their children, is, to pray to God for them ; forasmuch as without the assistance and

protection of the Divine Providence, all your endeavours for the well-being of your children, will be ineffectual, and all your counsels vain. You may inculcate the best precepts with the utmost care and diligence ; but you will never do it to effect, without the assistance of the Divine Grace : *Paul may plant, and Apollos water ; but it is God who giveth the increase.* You may take as much pains as you will to establish your family ; but remember always, that *except the Lord buildeth the house, their labour is in vain that build it.* Therefore you are to pray earnestly, humbly, and incessantly to Almighty God ; to that God *who giveth wisdom to the simple*, that he would inform the understandings, and *direct the hearts of your children in the ways of his laws, and the works of his commandments* : that he would remove far from them vanity and lies : that he would *make them a clean heart, and renew a right spirit within them* : that he would inspire them with charity and mercy, with truth and justice, with humility and meekness, with honesty, industry, and sincerity in all their dealings : *that your sons may grow up as the young plants, strong and upright, and fitted for the noblest works of the architect* : and, *that your daughters may be as the polished corners of the temple*, at once both ornaments and supports to the church of God : that your children may grow up good Christians, good wives, good husbands, good parents, good friends : that after the example of their blessed Lord and Redeemer, they may *grow up in wisdom, as in years, and in favour with God and man* : that they may go on from strength to strength, useful citizens to their country, subjects to their sovereign, and servants to their God ; guardians of religion and virtue of every kind to all around them, until they are gradually fitted and finished into living temples of the Holy Ghost ; the present pillars and ornaments of the earth, and future inhabitants of heaven.

Which God of his infinite mercy grant, through the merits and mediation of Jesus Christ.

S E R M O N CXXV.

The Duty of Children to their Parents.

EXOD. xx. 12.

Honour thy father and thy mother, that thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee.

ALL the precepts of religion respect either our duty to God, to our neighbour, or to ourselves: that is, the duties we owe to God, as creatures of his goodness, and dependants upon his providence; the duties we owe to mankind in the several relations of life; and the duties we owe to ourselves, in order to make us answer the ends of our being, and enable us to discharge the duties we owe to God and to one another: consequently, the duties we owe to ourselves are but secondary and subservient to those: and therefore our Blessed Saviour, being asked by the learned Pharisee, Which was the great commandment in the law? he answered, *Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment: and the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.* Now the law of God considers mankind as members of one great community; and therefore every member of this community is our neighbour; that is, one to whom we owe all the duties of a social creature, all the offices of humanity. But, forasmuch as the duties of this general tie were not sufficient to answer all the engagements and ends of life; therefore it hath pleased God to superadd to these, particular engagements and obligations, absolutely necessary to the order and well-being of society: and of these, the duty of children to parents hath justly obtained the first place: because all our other duties to mankind begin and are founded here. It is from a right deference to the authority and institutions of parents that we learn to become good men, good neighbours, good friends, and good subjects, as well as good sons. In one word, it is here we ordinarily learn all the offices of a social and rational creature, in our whole commerce with mankind: and therefore it is, that God in his great wisdom, when he had prescribed the duties relating to himself, in the decalogue, immediately subjoins that which

respects our parents, *Honour thy father and mother, &c.*

And this is agreeable to the very order of nature, forasmuch as parents are, next to God, the authors of our being. God indeed is properly our father, and earthly parents do but convey to us that being which God produces: but the consequence from this is, that although we owe more absolute and unlimited obedience to God, the fountain of our existence, yet we are to honour our parents, as his substitutes upon earth.

But forasmuch as this duty is not founded barely upon our existence, but is deduced with more force and greater evidence, from the advantages of early support, and early institution, derived to us by the care and affection of our parents; therefore all those that are to us in the place of parents, and in that relation eminently contribute to our well-being, have the fullest and clearest claim to paternal honour. And such are, among others, *our teachers and spiritual pastors*: from your parents you derive your being; from these, your well-being. From God you derive your immortal soul, with all its excellent faculties; from these you derive, under God, all that cultivation and improvement in virtue and knowledge, which are the glory even of immortal spirits.

In the next place, your governors are to you in the place of parents, because they are the fathers of their country; and the well-being of the community hath the same dependance upon their paternal care and vigilance, that particular houses have upon the prudence and affection of the masters of families. And indeed all government, as it is originally derived from paternal authority, is in truth no otherwise to be considered than as an enlargement of that authority; so that magistrates, succeeding into the place and office of parents, are to be regarded as public fathers, on whom the power of life and death, originally vested in parents, is now devolved. And as this is agreeable to the scripture-account of the origin of nations in general, divines have observed, that it seems to be more particularly evidenced in the common and successive name of the kings of the Philistines, Abimelech; which is a compound of two Hebrew words, *Abi-Melech*, my father the king; plainly shewing,

ing, that the title of king was only an appellation of honour, originally given to the father of the family.

Having thus shewn who they are to whom we are to pay honour and obedience, from the obligation of this precept, I proceed, in the next place, to explain the first branch of this duty enjoined in my text; namely, the duty of children to their parents.

First then, we are to honour our natural parents, or those whom the providence of God, or the constitution of our country, have substituted into their place. And this we are to do in the following instances: first, in reverence; secondly, in obedience; and, thirdly, in a grateful retribution of all the benefits we have received from them.

First, I say, we are to honour our parents by reverencing them. Now, reverence is an awful love, mixed with a fear of offending, which arises from respect and duty: not such a slavish dread as drives from the presence of those in authority over us, but such a filial and affectionate awe as fills us with veneration and esteem, and will engage us to attend to the monitions, and conform to the conduct, of our parents; and, at the same time, to abstain religiously from every thing that might give them the least trouble or disquiet. And this inward veneration is wont to shew itself both in our words and whole demeanour. First, in our words; for these, as they flow from a mind tenderly and dutifully affected, will naturally carry with them all the indications of veneration and affection that sounds can express; and will, at the same time, be submissive and few. Respect is a natural restraint upon us, which, from fear of giving offence, ties up the tongue from uttering any impropriety or indecency to our parents, even when we are obliged to reason and remonstrate against their conduct. Such is that earnest intercession of Jonathan to his father Saul, for the life of David his friend—his friend *that* was as his own soul: (1 Sam. ch. xix.) *Let not the king sin against his servant, against David; because he hath not sinned against thee, and because his works to thee-ward have been very good.* Nay, we have an instance of an undutiful son in the gospel, who, although he did not obey the authority of his father, did not, however, dare to

profess his disobedience; but, on the contrary, gave him good words, and a dutiful appellation, saying, *I go, Sir*, although he went not. And, certainly, the tribute of respectful language is the least that can be paid to those who have taught us to speak; and therefore the rude returns of wicked children to their parents are so detestable in the sight of God, that he hath in his law denounced a punishment against this crime, equal to that of blasphemy against himself. *He that curseth his father or his mother, shall surely be put to death.* (Exod. xxi. 17.) And (Prov. xx. 20.) *He that curseth his father or mother, his lamp shall be put out in obscure darkness.*

Again, the inward veneration due to parents is wont to shew itself in our whole demeanour. The humility of the mind naturally expresses itself, as in modesty of speech, so likewise in lowliness and submission of gesture; bowing the head, and bending the knee, upon every proper occasion.

An extraordinary instance of this is to be found in the demeanour of Joseph to his father. (Gen. xlviii. 12.) Highly exalted as he was in the court of the greatest monarch upon earth, he thought it no lessening to bend before his aged father, and pay him all the marks of submission and duty; nay, and he did this at a time when, the text assures us, *Jacob's eyes were dim*, and could not see; and consequently, when he could not be upbraided by his father for want of due respect, and probably would not have been blamed by any other mortal: for who would have been so vain as to censure the conduct of one who was at that moment in the highest reputation for wisdom and prudence of all mortals then alive? or, if their vanity could have carried them to censure his conduct, their fear of Pharaoh's first minister would certainly have obliged them to keep their thoughts to themselves. Yet, under all these circumstances of his father's blindness, his own exalted station, unrivalled wisdom, and uncontrolled power, Joseph's affectionate and dutiful heart would not suffer him to dispense with the least form of respect and veneration to his aged parent: for we read, that when he brought his sons from between his knees, to present them to his father, *he bowed himself with his face to the earth.* And surely

surely there is not any one circumstance of his grandeur that reflects half so much lustre upon his character as this single instance of filial humiliation. When I consider him upon his knees to God, I regard him as a poor mortal, in the discharge of duty to his Creator, of adorable majesty and infinite height above him. When I behold him bowing down to Pharaoh, I consider him in the dutiful posture of a subject to his prince, to whom he was indebted for the highest exaltation and honour. But when I see him bending to the earth, before a poor, old, blind, decrepit father, I behold him with admiration and delight: how doth that humiliation exalt him! A father, to whom he was so far from being indebted for a great fortune, or an honourable support, that, on the contrary, his father was obliged to him, as far as a father could be, upon both these accounts. He had no estate to settle, at least none worth Joseph's regard: nor had his son any inheritance to hope for from him, but his blessing; and that he thought he ought not to receive but in the lowest posture of humiliation and reverence. A demeanour, God knows, very distant from the principles and practice of the present age, who have no notion that any thing can be meant by a parent's blessing, but some mark of their bounty, or settlement of their fortune; and for this reason the best of parents are regarded as little better than an incumbrance upon the son's estate, and a bar to his happiness: and therefore it is no wonder if they are treated with no more respect than is absolutely necessary to secure the inheritance; I mean, so much of it as the wisdom of their ancestors hath left unsettled; otherwise, it is much to be feared, that rudeness and neglect would, (and in fact they do,) for the most part, fill up the place of reverence.

And this want of duty to parents is the effect of another and much greater want, the want of good principles, the want of a right sense of religion, and knowledge of the scriptures: for surely, if men were acquainted with the terrors of the Lord denounced against undutiful children, they could never allow themselves in the least instance of disobedience or disrespect to their parents. *The eye that mocketh at his father, saith Solomon, and despiseth to obey his mother, the ravens*

of the valley shall pick it out, and the young eagles shall eat it. And as this is often literally true in the calamitous end of abandoned children, whose carcases are, in the field of battle, whither their disobedience carried them, exposed to ravens, and vultures, and other birds of prey: or else upon gallows and gibbets, to which their villanies have brought them; villanies committed in contempt of the monitions and exhortations of their parents! the same sad fate is also frequently fulfilled upon undutiful children, in a metaphorical sense, in the deplorable ruin, and actual loss of eyes, brought upon such wretches by other rooks and vermin; by creatures of much greater prey, and surer destruction, than the ravens of the valley and the young eagles put together.

I have often admired it as a glorious instance of discipline in the Jewish commonwealth, that an undutiful child was to be stoned to death by the people: that so every one should be obliged to punish a crime which every one was obliged to abhor. But then it must be observed, that the parents had no right to bring the child before the magistrate, in order to this public condemnation, before they had first privately chastised him: for that was the letter of the law, (Deut. xxi. 18.) *If a man have a stubborn and rebellious son, which will not obey the voice of his father, or the voice of his mother; and when they have chastened him, will not hearken unto them; then it was that he was to be brought before the magistrate, accused, condemned, and stoned to death: so that private chastisement was always to go before that public, that infamous, that dreadful execution.*

This, my brethren, was the appointment and law of God, to his own people the Jews; and was, without question, the wisest institution that ever obtained in any nation; as it is the noblest monument of that wisdom and virtue, by which the Chinese think themselves distinguished above the rest of the world, at this day! the mighty veneration to parents enjoined by their laws, and the severe and exemplary punishment of undutifulness and disobedience. In China, if a father charges his son with any crime before a magistrate, there needs no other proof: he is immediately condemned.

If a son should presume to mock a parent, or lay violent hands upon him, the whole country is alarmed, and the judgment reserved for the emperor himself: the magistrates of the place are turned out; and all the neighbourhood threatened, as having given countenance to so infernal a temper, which must be supposed to have discovered itself upon other occasions; it is impossible, they think, it should have arrived to such a degree of villany at once. The criminal, in these cases, is sentenced to be cut into ten thousand pieces, and afterwards burnt! his houses and lands destroyed, and even the houses that stood near him; to remain as monuments of so detested a crime: or rather, that all remembrance of so abominable a villany should be effaced from the earth. Nor are even their emperors, in all their height of power, exempted from the strictest discharge of duty and piety to their parents.

But, further, as we must honour our parents with all the marks of outward reverence; so likewise, with all the real effects of sincere obedience,—*Children saith the apostle, (Coloss. iii. 20.) obey your parents in all things; for this is well pleasing unto the Lord.* And as this is founded in the law of God, it is also enjoined by the dictates of reason: forasmuch as parents are our natural superiors; and because they are better judges and directors of your conduct, from the advantage of more years and experience, than you can possibly be for yourselves: and although you should in time, from the benefit of a happier genius, or a better education, arrive to greater clearness of judgment and strength of reason than your parents, yet still, as long as you continue a part of their family, you are to pay them that obedience that is due to them as masters of their own household; and therefore are never to swerve from their commands, unless they should enjoin something contrary to the commands of God: in that case (and in that alone) your disobedience must be excused from the prior obligation you owe to your Creator, whose commands no mortal can control or dispense with: and even in this case, after you have made all the modest and dutiful remonstrances in your power, you are to obey passively; that is, you are patiently to submit to such chastisement as they shall think fit to in-

flict for your disobedience. For although they should chasten you after their own pleasure, as the apostle intimates, (Heb. ch. xii.) yet are you *to give them reverence.* And surely you ought, in common gratitude as well as justice, to bear with their infirmities, who have so often and so long borne with yours.

But there is one instance, wherein obedience to parents is of more importance to children than any other in life, and yet where they too often fail to pay it; and that is in the article of marriage: for, as long as children continue a part of their parents' family, (which must be till they think fit to dispose otherwise of them,) they are absolutely in their parents' power, and have no more right to dispose of themselves than they have to dispose of the parents' fortune or inheritance, or any of their goods: and therefore we find the parental authority of so great extent in the law of Moses, that the daughter who made a vow unknown to her father, was not allowed to ratify it without his consent; as you may read, Num. xxx.

But the institutions of the ancient Romans carried this point a great deal higher, and made children dependant upon the parental authority during their whole lives; nor could the highest honours or authority in the commonwealth exempt them from it. A father in Rome could call down his son from the rostrum, in the midst of his harangue to the people, to punish him for any misdemeanour: he could command him in the same manner from the senate, or from the head of his legions. Nor did the people, the fathers, or the army, dare to interpose in his defence: they considered the duty to parents as a prior obligation, which nothing subsequent could cancel. And doubtless this was one reason why the Roman marriages continued so long sacred and undisturbed; because they were never made, but with advice and deliberation of their parents. And, indeed, the contrary conduct is an instance of disobedience, that commonly carries its own punishment with it: and it is to be hoped, there are few children to whose final account this sin will be placed, because I am persuaded there are few that have been guilty of it, who have not had reason to repent very sincerely of it to the last day of their lives. And the reason of

of this is evident: the persons that take the eyes of young people most, are such as are skilled in the courtly forms and fashions of the world; such as have laid themselves out to dress and dance, and acquire such superficial and shewy accomplishments, as are too often at the greatest distance in the world from modesty, and good-nature, and good sense; and above all, from solid principles of true religion and virtue, which are the true foundations of all conjugal accomplishments.

Prudent parents well know, that the true conjugal attractions arise, not from outward ornament, but inward excellence. This is a law established in morality, and is in exact analogy to that great law established in nature; which teaches us, that the attractions of bodies are not in proportion to their surface, but their solid contents. Prudent parents well know, that such accomplishments as either arise from, or tend to establish true worth, can alone render any pair happy in an union that must last for life. This, I say, all prudent parents very well know; and therefore are best fitted to make a right choice for their children; but still with this caution, that they do not offer violence to their inclinations, by forcing them to marry against their will. For the rest, it were infinitely better, that perverse children should actually die in the disappointment of their inclinations, than that they should make both themselves and their parents for ever miserable, by an unfortunate and undutiful marriage.

S E R M O N CXXVI.

The same Subject continued.

EXOD. xx. 12.

Honour thy father and thy mother, that thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee.

IN a former discourse upon these words, I shewed you, that this duty of honouring our parents was of great extent: that it comprehended, first, the duty we owe to our kings and governors, who are the common fathers of their country; secondly, the duty we owe to our spiritual pastors and teachers, who have discharged the best offices of parents towards us, in teaching us true principles

of religion and virtue: and, thirdly, the duty you owe to your natural parents, and all those whom the providence of God hath placed in their stead: which consists of three parts: first, reverence; secondly, obedience; and, thirdly, a grateful retribution of the benefits that we have received from them.

Under the first head, I shewed you, that the duty of reverence to your parents discovered itself both in words and actions; in modest and respectful language to your parents, and a dutiful submissive demeanour towards them. A remarkable instance of which I shewed you, in the behaviour of Joseph to a poor, old, blind, decrepit father, when he himself was in the highest point of glory and wisdom. (Gen. xlviii.)

Under the second head, of obedience due to parents, I shewed you the great stress that God Almighty hath laid upon this duty; how strictly it was enjoined in the holy scriptures; the blessings promised to it, and the curses and signal judgments of God denounced against the transgression of it in the law of Moses; which placed the crime of disobedience to parents upon the same foot with that of blasphemy against God! that the stubborn and undutiful child was to be stoned to death, like the blasphemer.

I shewed you also, that this duty to parents was in the highest veneration among the wiser heathens; the ancient Romans, in their best days of virtue; and the present Chinese, with whom undutifulness to parents undergoes, at this day, the most dreadful punishments that can be imagined.

I come now to the third thing proposed; which was to shew you, that you must honour your parents, as by reverence and obedience, so likewise by a thankful and grateful return of all the blessings and benefits conferred upon you by them, as far as you are able, and they are in need. And this the apostle expressly enjoins, (1 Tim. v. 4.) *If any widows have children or nephews, let them learn first to shew piety at home, and to requite their parents.* The apostle mentions the children of widows in particular, because widowhood is the condition in life most subject to want and distress; and where children, taking the advantage of the weakness of a helpless mother, are most apt to be rebellious and undutiful: the

purpose of the apostle in this precept being to imply, from this particular instance, the duty of obedience, and support, and retribution, due from children to parents, whenever the ill state of their affairs requires it; and even when they are least in a condition to exact their gratitude, or punish their disobedience. A remarkable instance of this piety and reverence due to parents is in the behaviour of Solomon to his mother Bathsheba, (1 Kings, ii. 19.) when she came to solicit him in favour of Adonijah; for the text tells us, that *the king rose up to meet her, and bowed himself unto her, and sat down on the throne, and caused a seat to be set for the king's mother; and she sat on his right hand.* This he did to a widow mother, himself a king, the wisest of all mankind, and then the mightiest monarch of the whole world. He knew the duties of life rose with its grandeur, and gave new lustre to it: his enlarged and generous soul could not bear to have his piety less exalted than his power. And it is well known that there are, at this day, princes in the world, whose veneration for their parents will not suffer them so much as to sit down in their presence. And, God knows, the pious returns due from children to parents are at once the strongest dictates of gratitude and justice, and are but a poor retribution for all the care and expence of education, for all the anxious hours, and sleepless nights, that have been passed in solicitude for our welfare, and in distress for our ill health, and ill conduct. And will you requite all this affection with ingratitude and neglect? will you let them suffer under any necessity which you can relieve, who supported you for so many years of helpless want? will you despise their persons, of whom yourselves are a part? Surely, if the ingenuity of nature, and the principles of reason and virtue, are not quite extinguished in you, the love and solicitude your parents have long felt for you will exact ample returns from you: if not in equal measure, (which perhaps is not possible,) yet in the fullest, the amplest, the most acceptable that is in your power to make.

The course and compass of God's providence, and his methods of establishing and evidencing the measures of reciprocal duty, is no-where more remarkable than in the mutual obligations between parents

and their children (I say, the course of God's providence is no-where more remarkable, than in the measures of duty and obligation established between parents and their children); the child comes into the world naked and helpless, and, from himself, more destitute of the natural means of security and support, than almost any of the inferior creatures. In this exigency, the parental care and tenderness steps in to his relief; supplies all his necessities, and relieves all his wants; bears with all his untowardly dispositions, at an age when he is neither capable of being corrected, or convinced; and not only provides the properest food for him, when he is incapable of providing any for himself, but likewise administers it when he is incapable of feeding himself; bears with all degrees of his folly and impertinence; listens to all his trifling and idle inquiries, not only with patience, but with pleasure; till they gradually conduct him to health, and strength, and knowledge: but the child is not long arrived at this perfection of his nature, before his parents begin to fall gradually into the same infirmities, through which they but lately conducted and supported their children; and to need the same assistance which they lately lent. And, first, they begin to grow sickly; and then they call for the aid of that health which they cultivated and took care of in their children. The loss of cheerfulness and good humour commonly succeeds the loss of health; the old parents are uneasy, and fret at all about them: and now is the time for children to return all that tenderness and patience to their parents' peevishness, without sourness or reproof, which their parents had long lent them in all their childish perverseness, at an age when they were not capable of being corrected. In the next place, the old parents grow troublesomely talkative and (as youth is too apt to think) impertinent; and dwell eternally upon the observations and adventures of their times, and earlier years. Remember, you also had your time of being talkative and impertinent, and your parents bore with you; but, with this difference, you asked them silly and trifling questions, and they now tell you wise and useful observations. But they are troublesome, because they tell them too often. The answer to this is very obvious: if your parents bore with your

folly,

folly, you may well bear their wisdom: and although, perhaps, they talk more than is necessary to inform you of present things, yet their conversation turns mostly upon things past, perhaps past many years before you came into the world, and, consequently, such as they must know a thousand times better than you; or, though they should talk more than is necessary to inform you, they do not talk more than is necessary to inform your servants, or your children, who are now come to an age of asking many questions; and, therefore, Providence hath well appointed, that their grandfather or grandmother are now in an humour to answer them all, and to supply them with a store of useful observations which they want; nay, which they want to hear over and over again; which they want to have inculcated a thousand times; and which, without this assistance, would require a course of years to acquire for themselves. So that this humour of talkativeness, which is commonly thought so troublesome in old people, hath its use, and is most excellently appointed by Almighty God. But, say it were not, the children, in bearing with it, do but barely return their parents what they long since owed them.

In the next place, the strength of the old parents fails them, and they cannot walk without a support: but, sure, you will not let them want one! How many years did they bear you in their arms! How many more did they lead you where you would be, and saved you from falling, and from danger! And will you now suffer those old limbs to totter and fall to the earth, which so often supported and saved yours, when they were weak and tender, and unable to support and save themselves? Certainly you will not; you cannot at once be guilty of so much cruelty and ingratitude. In the last place, the understandings of the old parents begin to fail, and the strength of their minds doth not long outlive the strength of their bodies; but decays gradually, till they become again children; their teeth fall, and their tongues fail, and they are once more infants; and are now confined to their beds, as they were at first to their cradles. This is the last stage of life, and here they demand all that care, and compassion, and tenderness, at your hands, when they are just going

out of the world, which you called for at theirs, when you first came into it.

Thus is the course of nature fulfilled, and the circle of God's providence completed. And what child, that had the least remains of gratitude or goodness, would not be delighted to pay off this great debt of nature, to pursue this round of filial duty, in a conscientious discharge of all the good offices they owe their aged parents? Nay, what child, that had any goodness, would not regard this retribution as his greatest honour and happiness? What child, that had any goodness, would wish to live longer in this world, than whilst God inclined his heart to this delightful and glorious branch of his duty? For, surely, it is in this respect, more than in any other whatsoever, that Solomon's observation is verified, when he tells us, that *fathers are the glory of their children*.

And here we see, in part, the reason of the reward of *long life* promised in the text to dutiful children: for, as nothing so naturally shortens the lives of parents, as the misery and distress brought upon them by the disobedience and impiety of their children; and, on the other hand, nothing so greatly contributes to the peace and happiness of parents, and, of consequence, to their health and life, as the obedience and piety of their issue; nothing can be a more suitable reward of that piety than length of life: and surely the blessing of long life, annexed to the duty of honouring the father and mother, is no-where so complete, is no-where so perfect a blessing, as when the child hath the happiness to pay off the great debt of gratitude to his aged parents, to return some part of what he owes to them, for support and correction, for affection and tenderness, for example and instruction! and, in one word, for all the blessings of a religious and virtuous education. A debt for ever to be paid, and never to be discharged! and therefore, Homer, in his usual strength of just and fine thinking, mentions it as a calamitous circumstance in the death of a young hero, that he was cut off in his bloom, before he had made any retribution to his parents for his education and support—*ὅδ' ἐ τοκευσὶ θεράπια φίλοις ἀπιδωκε*.

Nay, although a parent were faulty, and failed in any or all these instances, yet still humanity calls upon us to com-

passionate their infirmities; and generosity should prompt us to upbraid them with our goodness, and to pay where we did not owe. There is an instance of heathen piety in this point, that christians should blush at: T. Manlius was ill treated, and turned out of doors, by a severe father, who was soon after called to an account by the tribune for this, and some other part of his conduct. A day was appointed for his trial, and every one concluded his life was lost. The son heard of his danger, and, without saying a word to any mortal, went secretly to the tribune, and inquired about it. The tribune answered, that what he had heard was truth; and that a principal part of the accusation against him was a cruel treatment he, his son, had received from him. Upon this, Manlius puts a dagger to the tribune's breast, and vowed immediate death to him, if he did not that moment drop the prosecution. The tribune, in terror of his life, solemnly swore he would, and did accordingly; and the next day reported the whole truth to the assembly; and the father was acquitted for the generosity of the son. How few sons are there now in the world who would make as generous a return to the tenderness and fondness of their fathers, as this son did to the cruelty of his!

There is also a remarkable instance of filial piety in the history of China. In the reign of the emperor Vuen Ti, a mandarin was condemned to death; and was guilty enough to deserve it. He had the good fortune to have a daughter affectionate and dutiful to him, beyond the ordinary measures of filial piety; who addressed the emperor in his behalf, presenting a memorial to him, wherein she offered herself a slave for life, to save the life of her father. The emperor, struck with so extraordinary an instance of piety, pardoned the father, and left his daughter in her freedom. (Churchill's Collect. vol. i. p. 164.) And this was the more remarkable, inasmuch as daughters are little regarded by the Chinese, and often exposed.

There is one instance of filial obedience in the Scriptures, and of the great regard which God hath to it, both of a very extraordinary nature. Jonadab, the son of Rechab, had laid his commands upon his sons, that neither they, nor their descend-

ants, should drink wine, or build houses, or till the earth for ever; but that they should lead a pastoral life, and dwell in tents. This command of their father both they and their children so religiously obeyed, for many generations, that, in the days of Jehoiakim, the son of Josiah, they gave a public proof of their piety to their parent in the temple, and in the presence of the prophet, as you may read in the xxxvth chapter of the prophesy of the prophet Jeremiah, the 1st and the following verses. And although these commands of their father Jonadab had no strict claim to their obedience, either from the law of Nature, or the law of God, but might well enough be dispensed with consistently with both; yet God (to shew the regard he hath for piety to parents) was graciously pleased to reward their obedience in a very extraordinary manner; as you may read in the forecited chapter, at the 18th and 19th verses. *And Jeremiah said unto the house of the Rechabites, Thus saith the Lord of Hosts, the God of Israel; Because you have obeyed the voice of Jonadab your father, and kept all his precepts, and done according to all that he hath commanded you; therefore, thus saith the Lord of Hosts, the God of Israel—Jonadab, the son of Rechab, shall not want a man to stand before me for ever.*

And thus I have gone through the several parts of the child's duty to his parents, and have shewn you the great regard that Almighty God beareth to filial piety. I have shewn, that you are to honour your parents in words and actions, with expressions of respect and reverence, and with a modest and submissive behaviour, with a dutiful obedience to all their lawful commands, and a grateful retribution of all the blessings and benefits you have received from them: remember the blessing of long life promised by God to your obedience, and assure yourselves, that blessing, well used, will end in the blessing of life everlasting. On the other hand, remember the dreadful imprecations pronounced upon neglect, and impiety, and disobedience to parents. Remember whose eye it is that the ravens of the valley shall eat, and whose light it is that shall be put out in obscure darkness; in obscure darkness in this world, and eternal darkness in the next; even his, *that curseth his father or his mother; and his,*
that

that mocketh at his father, and despiseth to obey his mother. Nor are these curses due only to him that insults and abuses his parents, but also to him that slights and neglects them; for so we read, (Deut. xxvii. 16.) *curst is he that setteth light by his father or mother: and all the people shall say, Amen.* But if all this cannot move you, if you have no compassion for your own immortal souls, have some pity upon your afflicted and aged parents. (I speak this to an audience *, which I hope is, I am sure ought to be, more sensible in this point, than any other of a different condition in the whole world.) My own experience (in this place *) hath fully informed me, of the infinite, the unspeakable concern of parents, for the well-being of their children, and their much more unspeakable sorrow and affliction for their miscarriage. I have seen such joy rising in the eyes of a happy parent, upon the receiving a glad account of his son's conduct, as hath infused new transport into my own heart; and, on the other hand, I have seen such distracted looks, such fixed distress, such tears of anguish, from the eyes of unhappy parents, as have pierced my heart. If your parents' grief make this impression upon the breasts of strangers, can you be insensible of it? Is there in nature a greater instance of cruelty, than to give calamity and affliction where we owe joy and transport, and where we could pay it with double happiness to ourselves? Was ever any instance of barbarity devised like that of making those inexpressibly miserable, who have made it the business of their lives to make us eternally happy? Murder is, in every instance, and under the most alleviating circumstances of passion and provocation, a most heinous and detestable sin; but, surely, the bringing down a parent's grey hairs with sorrow to the grave, is murder in its dreadfullest shape! I have often pitied the condition of executioners, who were forced, from the misery of their circumstances, to inflict the necessary severities of the law upon the basest of mankind. I should die to think of punishing my own parent, although he were a malefactor; but to punish an innocent and a good man, to punish an innocent and a good woman, my tender parent,

* Preached in the college.

and my best friend; and that too with such anguish as is not in the power of tyranny—O God! deliver all that fear thee from so exquisite a calamity!

If any of you that hear me have been guilty of this sin, make haste to repent of it; for, surely, judgment is gone out against it; and nothing less than a thorough repentance, the repentance of our whole lives, can arrest the vengeance due to it. If any of you are in a course of vice or idleness, or in any purpose of disobedience or displeasure to your parents, let this single consideration stop you short. Will you indulge your own idle purposes, or vicious pleasures, or obstinate perverseness, at the expence of your parents' happiness? Will you live idle and wanton, to make them labour under affliction and sorrow all their days? Will you add murder to iniquity? If vice were attended with no other evil; if neither poverty, nor disease, nor infamy waited upon it; if there were no such thing as a heaven or hell hereafter; if neither death nor damnation pursued it; the single consideration of misery to your distressed, afflicted parents should make you dread it in every instance, and shun it in every shape. Which that we may all do, &c.

S E R M O N CXXVII.

The Duty of Servants to their Masters.

EPHES. vi. 5, 6, 7, 8.

Servants, be obedient to them that are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in singleness of your heart, as unto Christ: Not with eye-service, as men-pleasers; but as the servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart; With good-will doing service, as to the Lord, and not to men: Knowing, that whatsoever good thing any man doth, the same he shall receive of the Lord, whether he be bond or free.

SERVITUDE seems to have been originally founded in the natural inequality in the abilities of men: for as some men, from the advantage of greater prudence and more extensive knowledge, are fitted to direct and preside in the conduct of affairs; so others, for want of those advantages, and through a natural incapacity of providing and directing, were obliged to submit themselves and their concerns to the guidance and discretion of other men. And as this difference of abilities

abilities occasioned as great a difference in the possessions of men, upon the establishment of property in the world, from hence also arose another reason of servitude; forasmuch as some men being entirely destitute of property, or at least such a portion of it as was sufficient for their support, were forced to let themselves out to hire, and give their labour in exchange for the necessaries of life. And as these compacts were originally established for life, (or at least too quickly became so,) with a power of arbitrary correction and chastisements in the master, even to maiming and death; the insolence and cruelty of inhuman masters made the condition of servants a state of unspeakable misery for many generations: and the natural consequence from such ill treatment and inhumanity in the masters, was an idleness and neglect on the side of the servants, and an utter disregard of their master's interest, whenever it was consistent with their own safety; together with secret resolutions of revenge, upon the first opportunity. And hence it is, that in all the ancient comedies, which are the truest representations of life, the business of the slave is, always to corrupt the son, and defraud the master: that is, to injure him in his two nearest concerns; not without violence to his person, whenever he can find any pretence for a disguise to execute his vengeance with impunity.

In this condition Christianity found the world; and as it is the business of that excellent institution to correct the errors of mankind, and improve their manners; to banish violence and villany, and introduce peace and good-will in their stead; the world has been gradually humanized and improved by it, as in every other instance, so likewise in this of dominion and servitude. That excellent religion which teaches us, that humility, and mercy, and love are the distinguishing badges of our Christian profession, could not fail to teach us the duty of treating our fellow-creatures with gentleness and humanity, and inspire us with an utter abhorrence of that cruelty to our Christian brethren, which would ill become us to the beasts that perish; nay, and would be criminal even there. And hence it came to pass, that the laws of perpetual servitude, and the power of life and limbs, were gradually relaxed and taken

away; and mankind restored to their native and original freedom, and social rights. And although many of them cannot yet subsist out of a state of servitude, yet are they under no necessity of continuing in it, for any longer term than they themselves have consented to: so that, if they cannot live in absolute freedom, they have at least what is next to it; for to have it in our power to change our masters after a determined time, and cease to serve whenever the condition of our affairs will allow us, is in the next degree to full liberty. In the mean time, the lives and limbs of servants are as well secured to them, at least in this part of the world, as their masters to them; and to deprive them of either is, in the eye of the law, equally criminal. But then, on the other hand, that masters should not be put in a worse condition, by the diminution of their powers and prerogatives over their servants, the Christian religion hath now bound all that duty and fidelity upon the consciences of servants, which before were only the effects of restraint and fear. Hence it is, that St. Paul, in the words of my text, enjoins servants to pay all kind of observance to their masters, from the motives of a good conscience, and a sense of duty towards God; assuring them, that an honest discharge of their duty in this point is highly acceptable in the sight of God, and will have its reward. *Servants, be obedient to them that are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in singleness of your heart, as unto Christ: Not with eye-service, as men-pleasers; but as the servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart: With good-will doing service, as to the Lord, and not to men: Knowing, that whatsoever good thing any man doth, the same shall he receive of the Lord, whether he be bond or free.*

Now, the business of this discourse shall be, from these words of the apostle, to explain and enforce the duty of servants in all its parts; which I shall endeavour to do, in the proof and enforcement of the following propositions.

First, Servants are to obey their masters; and, secondly, they are to be faithful to them.

First, I say, they are to obey their masters. And this necessarily arises from the

the nature of servitude; for the very condition of that compact is, that one man shall submit his will and actions to the discretion and direction of another: and therefore a servant is supposed to have no will of his own, where his master is concerned; but to submit himself entirely to the will of his master, and to obey all his lawful commands.

By lawful commands are meant all such as are not contrary to the laws of God, or the community: and the reason of this is evident; because all mankind are under prior obligations to God and society, and therefore all other engagements must yield to these; and, whenever they happen to be inconsistent with them, they immediately cease, and become null and void. Therefore, if your master should command you to lie or steal, to defame or defraud, or commit any vice or villany whatsoever, there you are absolutely to disobey him; because God hath commanded you not to do any of these things; and the apostles have taught us, that we ought to *obey God rather than men*. But as long as the master's commands are within the bounds of religion, and the laws of the land, so far the servant is obliged to submit, and pay entire obedience to them; and this he is to do with fear and cheerfulness.

First, He is to obey with fear; *Servants*, (saith the apostle,) *be obedient to them that are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling*. Now, where men find themselves obliged to a dutiful and conscientious obedience, it is unavoidable but that they must be afraid of giving any offence, or provoking to anger and resentment, by neglect and disobedience. Fear is a natural restraint upon the giddiness and perverseness of our nature: it awakens all our caution and diligence, and makes us attentive and observant: it makes us careful to understand the directions of our superiors, and diligent to execute them. And therefore we may say of it in this case, as Eliphaz does to Job, *Is not this thy fear, thy confidence?* The sense of a proper awe upon our minds gives us the best assurance of our having a due regard to the commands of our superiors, and the discharge of our duty. Besides this, fear is the great principle of prudence, as well as industry: it awakens the abilities of the soul, sets them to work upon their proper objects,

and urges them to their proper ends. Almost all knowledge, as well as discipline and virtue, are founded in fear. *The fear of the Lord*, saith Solomon, *is the beginning of wisdom: a good understanding have all they that do thereafter*. And as the fear of the highest authority naturally leads us to the highest and most excellent wisdom (the knowledge of the laws and will of our Creator); so the reverence we owe to the inferior degrees of it leads us to proportionable degrees of discretion and prudence in the conduct of our lives. And therefore servants are to be awfully observant and obedient to the commands of their masters, not only for conscience-sake, but likewise on account of that improvement of their own minds and manners, which such a reverence and fear of authority will naturally inspire. But,

Secondly, Servants are to obey with cheerfulness; *with good-will doing service*, saith the apostle: and therefore they are carefully to avoid all that sullen and surly behaviour which renders their persons hateful, and their best services disagreeable. A sourness and restiveness to the commands of superiors is a sure indication of inherent pride, that disdains subjection; and is much better fitted for insolence in power, than obedience in subjection. And this spirit of insolence is so frequently to be met with in servants, that a man who makes right reflections upon it will find infinite reason to bless the good providence of Almighty God, by whose wise appointment so many turbulent and malignant spirits were placed in a condition of the lowest subjection; who, had they been raised to dominion and rule, would have been the greatest monsters of oppression and tyranny that ever the world produced. Histories of all ages are full of examples to this purpose: and that this is the sense of mankind upon the point, may be collected from the proverbs of all nations, which have not failed to observe upon the remarkable insolence of persons raised from a low condition to any heights of fortune. And this is so apparent in a thousand instances, that (as Sylla is said to have seen many Marius's in Cæsar) some men of good understanding have been confident, that they have observed many Neros in a common footman, or day-labourer: and therefore persons of this character,

character, instead of indulging their innate pride, in insolence and fullness to their superiors, should endeavour, to the utmost of their power, to subdue it to the dictates of their duty: and remember, it was the great goodness of Almighty God, to place them in that low condition of life, where the malignity of their nature would have the least room to exert itself; and where they have avoided much of that guilt, and that punishment, which higher degrees of power and affluence would have devolved upon them. And this motive to modesty and submission in servants will be much strengthened by considering, that pride and stiffness will always expose them to ill treatment. A modest demeanour, joined to a readiness to execute the master's commands, is such an indication of a good mind and good will to their service, as naturally wins their affection, and inclines them, in return, to do you all the good offices in their power; and to make the yoke of servitude sit as light and easy upon you as they can: whereas the contrary behaviour will always excite them to such degrees of rebuke and correction, as perhaps you can very ill bear; and yet are obliged in conscience to submit to, whether they be just or unjust. *Servants*, saith St. Peter, in the 2d chapter of his first epistle, at the 18th and following verses—*Servants, be subject to your masters, with all fear, not only to the good and gentle, but also to the froward; for this is thank-worthy, if a man for conscience towards God endure grief, suffering wrongfully: for what glory is it, if when ye be buffeted for your faults, you take it patiently? But if when you do well, and suffer for it, ye take it patiently; this is acceptable with God.* From hence we learn, that servants are not only obliged to submit to the just corrections of their masters, but likewise to such as are the effects of frowardness and ill temper. And as nothing is so apt to sour the temper of the best masters as fullness and insolence in their servants, so nothing is more apt to bring unjust correction upon them; because it makes every thing they do, disagreeable, however right in itself; and urges the master to lay hold on all opportunities and pretences of subduing and mortifying that evil spirit by the sharpest and severest correction. Whereas, on the other hand, humility and meekness have the happiest

effects upon the dispositions of all they deal with: they turn the edge of the sharpest rage; they are like wool-sacks to the fiercest instruments of war; their yielding softness abates their violence, and subdues their force. Meekness is, in this respect, like charity; for as it *beareth all things*, so likewise doth it *cover a multitude of sins*. *A soft answer* (saith Solomon) *turneth away wrath: but grievous words stir up anger.* And again, *By long forbearance is a prince persuaded, and a soft tongue breaketh the bone.* That is, gentle and modest replies soften the most hardened and obstinate dispositions; and descend, as the Psalmist expresses it, *like oil into the bones*. Modesty and humility are as the grave ground in a picture, which sets off the fairest colours, and shews all the figures to greater advantage. Modesty, in a servant, places all his actions in the best light; and inclines the most froward and perverse masters to bear with their infirmities, and put the best construction upon all their conduct.

But farther, Servants are not only to submit to the correction of their masters, but they are to profit and become better by it; for amendment and reformation are the end of all correction: and therefore servants must not think they have done enough, when they have listened calmly to the master's rebuke, or submitted patiently to his chastisement; for all this is to no purpose, unless they are amended by it. And therefore they are to observe, and reflect carefully upon the reasons and circumstances of their miscarriage and misbehaviour, whenever they have committed a fault; and make serious resolutions of more care and better conduct another time. For example: this was the effect of sloth and idleness. This, my conceit brought upon me. Had I listened to good advice, I might have avoided this mischief; and so on. And forasmuch as the business of most servants lies within a very narrow compass, the sum of their employment being a train of the very same low offices repeated every day, with very little variety; it is evident, that as there is but a very moderate degree of capacity required to enable them to know their duty, so likewise as moderate a degree of care and diligence will enable them to discharge it as they ought; and therefore, whatever excuse there may be for the first committal of faults, there

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can be none for the frequent repetition of them, especially after correction; for even brute beasts will learn to shun those actions that are attended with punishments, even against the instinct of nature. They will learn to fly from meats and drinks that are naturally very agreeable and desirable to them: and therefore, for reasonable creatures to commit the same faults to which they can have no natural instinct, after frequent rebuke and correction, is in truth to become more than brutal; to act even below the beasts that perish. And therefore it is no wonder, if the common end of such incorrigible creatures is utter ruin and destruction. The master grows weary of correction, and lets them go their own way; and their own way being the way of vice and villany leads directly to infamy and the gallows. And indeed, this is also God's way of dealing with incorrigible sinners: *for whom he loveth, he chasteneth*; but when chastening hath no effect for their amendment, he delivers them over to a reprobate sense.

And thus much in proof and explication of the first proposition I laid down; namely, that servants are to obey their masters.

I come now to the second proposition I proposed to speak to; and that was, that servants are to be faithful to their masters.

And this faithfulness is of two sorts: the first consists in an honest discharge of duty to them, in every thing they employ you about, to the best of your abilities. If in bodily labour, you are to labour in their service as far as your health and strength will allow: if in the abilities of your mind, you are to serve them to the best of your understanding, without injuring their affairs by sloth, or delay, or negligence: and this kind of fidelity is opposed to *eye-service*.

The next sort of faithfulness consists in being true and just to your masters in every thing committed to your trust: and this fidelity is opposed to fraud and theft.

First, I say, you are to serve him with an honest diligence, without idleness, neglect, or delay: and this the apostle requires, when he enjoins servants to be obedient to their masters, *not with eye-service, as men-pleasers, but as the servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart*. That is, you are to employ your-

selves diligently in your master's service, not barely whilst his eye is upon you, and you are apprehensive of being chastised for your idleness; but at all times; even when he is least likely to see or to punish your neglect. And this you are to do in discharge of a good conscience, because you are paid for it: your time and strength are no longer your own, when you are hired; they are your master's, and to be employed in his service; and consequently you cannot employ them as you please, but as he directs: nor can you misemploy them, or withhold them from him, without manifest fraud and injustice. Robbing a man of the time he hath bought of you is just as wicked as to rob him of his money, or his goods, or any other purchase he hath paid for. The injustice is exactly the same in both; and therefore the apostle saith, you are *to be obedient to your masters, not with eye-service, as men-pleasers; but as the servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart*; that is, you are to discharge the duties of your service out of a sense of conscience, in full assurance that in so doing you do what God requires of you; for God requires justice in all your dealings, and will severely punish the neglect and violation of it: and therefore, although your master doth not behold your idleness, God sees it, and will require a severe account of it; and you can no more escape his vengeance than you can avoid his sight: besides, it has pleased God so to order the state of things here below, that diligence and industry are the sure way to health, and credit, and prosperity in the world.

Idleness is able to destroy the best constitution of body and mind that ever was framed! and I myself have observed beggars, who began in sloth, end in real infirmities, and a ruined constitution. And it is notorious of numbers of people that they lose their limbs for want of using them; whereas all the powers of soul and body are remarkably improved by application and exercise. Milo, who had just strength enough the first day to lift a calf, by constant practice of lifting him every day, became at last to have strength enough to lift him, even when he was grown up into an ox: and the greatest prodigies of wisdom and science that ever appeared in the world had their beginnings in the same low rudiments of know-

knowledge with the rest of mankind. Men are born, in the general, nearly equal: instruction and industry, culture and diligence, make the great distinctions between man and man. Industry is of so excellent a nature, that it will scarcely suffer any bounds to be set to our improvement; nor is it possible to say, to what strength of body and mind unwearyed application will carry us at the last! and therefore Solomon most excellently advises, *Whatever thine hand findeth to do, do it with all thy might.* A motto, that ought to be graved in characters of gold, over the shops of all artists, as well as the closets of the studious. Solomon well knew the worth of diligence, (and perhaps none but the wisest man that ever lived was acquainted with its full value,) and therefore he is large in the praise of it: *He becometh poor that dealeth with a slack hand; but the hand of the diligent maketh rich.* Again, *The hand of the diligent shall bear rule; but the slothful shall be under tribute.* *The soul of the sluggard desireth, and hath nothing; but the soul of the diligent shall be made fat.* And again, *Seest thou a man diligent in his business? he shall stand before kings; he shall not stand before mean men.* And therefore, if you will not be diligent and industrious for your masters' sakes, be so at least for your own; to acquire such habits as will strengthen your body and your mind, and raise you to credit and prosperity in the world: and, what is more, will keep you out of idleness, the great parent of vice and wickedness of every kind, which will clothe you with infamy and rags, and bring you to certain ruin at the last; will destroy you, body and soul.

The last duty required of servants is faithfulness to their trust; that is, an honest care and management of all goods and things committed to their charge, without fraud or waste. And this is of all others the highest and most important part of the servant's duty; because his own conscience, and his master's interest, are more nearly concerned in it than in any other: it being oftentimes in the power of a wicked servant, by one hour's wilful villany in this point, to ruin the best master and wealthiest man. And therefore the apostle, in the words of my text, enjoins servants to be obedient to their masters, *in singleness of heart*; that is, with an honest and upright mind.

And (Titus, ii. 9.) he directs that bishop to exhort servants to *be obedient to their masters, and to please them well in all things; not answering again, nor purloining; but shewing all good fidelity.* And under this head of *purloining* are to be reduced all frauds of every kind, all bribes, all false weights and measures, by which the servants are profited, and the master is injured; in short, all possible ways where, by servants are wont to make gain, or interest, or friendship for themselves, to the loss and damage of their masters: for all these ways of gain are downright frauds and thefts, and are but the more criminal, as they are contrived with more subtlety and security: nay, this sort of cheating is much baser, and more villanous, than common stealing; because you do not only defraud your master, but you likewise break faith, and betray your trust at the same time: you add treachery to theft! and therefore this villany is doubly hateful to God and man.

The other way of being unfaithful to your master is by wasting his goods, although without profit to yourself, or suffering them to be embezzled by others; and this is, in effect, and in the consequences of it to your masters, the very same with wilful fraud and theft. For what matters it to your master whether he is injured or ruined by your fraud or by your negligence? So that the breach of trust in you, and the evil to your master, is exactly the same in both. He trusted you with his substance, and you have betrayed him to his damage; it may be, to his ruin.

As the world is constituted, it is impossible to live or transact our affairs in life without confiding in somebody or other, upon a thousand occasions; and on whom can you depend with so much security as on him that eats of your bread, and is bound by all the ties of duty and conscience to be faithful to you? And what advantage would it be to masters, to be secure that their servants would not themselves cheat them, if at the same time, through their idleness or negligence, they suffer others to defraud them? And therefore, he that suffers his master to be injured through his fault, although without profit to himself, betrays his trust, and is as criminal in the sight of God, as if he had injured him for his own gain; nay, rather, he is more criminal; for he that

that injures his master for his own profit hath some plea, some pretence for his villany, and some temptation to it; whereas he that injures him without any advantage to himself hath no pretence, not so much as the excuse of a temptation for his wickedness; and therefore such a one takes to himself the most scandalous and detestable character in the world, that of being wicked for wickedness sake.

And here I must take notice, that there is one kind of waste wherein servants are more frequently faulty towards their masters than any other; and that is, waste of food, and this is of two sorts: one is, when they suffer any meats or drinks, under their care, to perish, be lost, or become useless, through their negligence. Now every waste of this kind is a grievous wickedness; inasmuch as, besides the injury to the owners, it is despising the Divine bounty and beneficence; and, in effect, trampling the gifts of God under foot. Which is surely a most shocking complication of insolence and ingratitude! and one would think our blessed Saviour Jesus Christ had effectually guarded against this guilt at the close of that glorious miracle, whereby he fed so immense a multitude with five loaves and two fishes (St. John, ch. vi.); for when he had done so, he gave express orders to *gather up the fragments that remain, that nothing be lost*. Although this food was produced in all the abundance of Divine munificence, and with all the ease of Almighty power; yet care was taken by the very Creator himself, that not the least part of it should be abused to waste.

The next kind of waste which servants are too frequently guilty of, is the abuse of meats and drinks committed to their care, to the purposes of riot and excess; to make themselves useless to all the duties of their station, it may be, to their own, and to the ruin of others: nay more, oftentimes to the intoxicating the servants of others, so as to make them also useless at best; and too often even destructive to the houses, and limbs, and lives of their masters and mistresses intrusted to them. How dreadful a guilt is this, thus to pervert the purposes of the Divine beneficence! Negligent waste is trampling the gifts of God under foot; but riotous waste is turning his blessings

into curses; into curses upon yourselves and others! To how many excellent purposes might those wastes of excess, now so pernicious, be applied! to lighten the labours of life; to soften the bed of sickness, to *make the widow's heart sing for joy*. What infinite evil doth waste commit! what infinite good doth it prevent, and pervert! and the authors of it, how extensively are they, how effectually, how emphatically wicked!

But there is one point wherein the fidelity of servants is more eminently required than in any other whatsoever, and yet where they are wont to abuse and betray their trust more than in any other; and that is, the care of their masters' children. I shall omit a thousand instances of misconduct and abuse, and instance only in two. The first is, that abominable custom among servants, of teaching children vice and wickedness, as the first rudiments of knowledge. And this is so notorious, that, take any child you meet, and it is odds but the first sentence or word he learnt to speak, was either an oath or an ill name: and if servants are taken to task for this villany, they answer, there is no manner of harm in it, because the poor child does not know what he says. Perhaps he does not; but yet it is more probable that he does; for it is certain, that children often understand words even before they can speak them; and if they do speak some ill words before they understand them, I dare say, it will not be your fault if they continue long in that ignorance; for the same corruption of mind that prompted you to teach them those ill words, will also prompt you to make them understand what is meant by them, as soon as you can; and not only understand, but practise too. Ye wicked creatures! little do ye consider, that the first impressions made upon children always sink the deepest, and last the longest, and are hardly possible to be effaced from the mind. And therefore Solomon rightly advises, *Train up a child in the way he should go, and, when he is old, he will not depart from it*. And the observation is full as true, I am afraid, more so, if you train him up in the way he should not go. Shame is the great guardian of youth, the great barrier that secures them from sin and wickedness; and if that be early taken away, a flood of vice will break in

in upon them like a torrent, and overwhelm the whole man. Alas! little do ye consider what you will have to answer for at the great day of account, who, in return to all the care and kindness of a good master, have destroyed, perhaps, his only child, and turned the innocence of an angel into the guilt of a devil. I would to God, that, in order to deter servants from this abominable practice, there were laws to make all crimes of this kind punishable by the most tormenting death that ever was invented: and yet, when that was done, it would make but little atonement for those infinitely greater torments of hell, to which those wretches had betrayed so many helpless and innocent infants.

The second instance I shall mention of the infidelity of servants to the children of their masters, and too often to themselves, is flattery; a vice which is founded in the worst corruption of a wicked heart, and is the greatest destroyer of every virtue in the soul; it is a rank manure which raises nothing but weeds in the best soils. Nor is this all; for as it raises and feeds the worst weeds, it kills the best plants, and suffers nothing good and salutary to live near it. A flatterer always puts me in mind of those filthy beasts mentioned by many naturalists, whose way of destroying all that will endure them is by licking them to death.

And thus I have done with the several parts of the servant's duty; and the sum of all that God requires of him, is this; first, that he be obedient to all his master's just commands; that is, such as are not contrary to the laws of God, or the laws of the land: but he is not to obey him in any thing that is evil; therefore he is not to swear, or lie, or defraud, or commit any sort of vice or villany, in obedience to his master; because God has forbidden him to do any of these things; and he is to obey God rather than man.

Secondly, He is to obey his master with fear. And this will make him cautious and observant; will check the natural pride and perverseness of human nature, and bring him, by degrees, to discretion and prudence; for all wisdom, and all virtue, begins and is founded in fear.

Thirdly, He is to obey cheerfully, with good-will doing service; and therefore he is carefully to avoid all pride and

insolence, all short and sullen answers. These are the faults that make servants hateful, and render every thing they do, disagreeable, and expose them to the wrath and vengeance of their master; whereas modesty and cheerfulness recommend both themselves, and every thing they do; and place all their services in the best light.

Fourthly, They are to submit to the corrections of their masters, whether just or unjust; and not only to submit to them, but to amend by them. To be incorrigible even in neglect (and much more in guilt) is a most shameful character; and seldom ends but in utter ruin.

Fifthly, Servants are to use an honest diligence in the discharge of their duty; and this, in opposition to idleness and eye-service; and this they are to do, first, for conscience-sake towards their masters, because God requires it of them: and, secondly, for their own sakes, because diligence and industry are the sure means to health, and credit, and prosperity in the world.

And, in the last place, Servants are to be true and just to their masters, and faithful in the care and discharge of all trusts committed to them (especially the care of his children); and are neither to injure or defraud them themselves, nor to suffer others to do so; because all the injury you do your master, if it be for your own profit, is theft; and the worst of all thefts, because it is attended with treachery, and breach of trust; and if it be without profit to yourself, the injury to your master, and the breach of trust in you, is still the same; and you are at the same time more inexcusable, because you commit wickedness for wickedness sake.

And now, my brethren, when you have discharged all these parts of your duty, the next thing incumbent upon you as good Christians, is to be content with that low condition of life in which it has pleased God to place you; and you will be content, if you consider, that God governs the world; and that all his appointments are the appointments of the wisest and the best of all beings. And therefore, whatever state of life he assigns us, must be the very best that could be assigned us. Had you been placed in a higher station, how can you tell what pride and insolence, what vice and villany

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you had been exposed to, which might have ended in the destruction both of your body and soul? And therefore, instead of repining at your condition, you are to bless God, who hath not led you into so great temptations as wealth, and power, and grandeur are, but delivered you from evil. If you suffer from a severe master, consider, that although you might not have deserved chastisement at his hand, you have deserved that, and much more, at the hand of God; and what is it to you, by what instrument it pleases God to execute his correction upon you? And this you know, that if, *when ye do well, and suffer for it, ye take it patiently, this is acceptable with God.* Consider moreover, that although your condition is subject to many inconveniences, yet, in the midst of these, it has one great and peculiar advantage; and that is, that you are freed by it from some, if not all the great anxieties of life. For what is all that, for which the sons of men toil and disquiet themselves in this vale of misery, but a little food and raiment, and a convenient shelter from the weather? and two of these the very worst of you have ready provided to your hands, at your master's expence, without any care or trouble of your own; and many of you have all three. But what above all gives the great and distinguishing advantage to your condition is this: that as you have less to be anxious for in this world, you have less to be answerable for in the next; to you less is given, and of you less is required. What are all the power, and wealth, and dominion of this world, but so many great stewardships, of which the owners must give a severe account to their great Lord and Master at the last day? And what man in his senses would wish to have a long and heavy account upon his hands at the great day of judgment? Do but imagine a mighty potentate, summoned, together with his meanest vassal, to the great tribunal of God; and the question fairly put to him, What hast thou done with all that wealth and all that power I committed to thy charge? *Give an account of thy stewardship.* Alas! where is that mighty man upon earth, that could give clear and satisfactory answers to these questions? Who would have wealth, who would have power, who would have a great estate, who would have

an empire, upon these terms? Whereas, when the poor servant is questioned, if he has been a good man, his accounts are short, and his answers are easy: Lord, I have served thee, and been faithful to my master; I had but little, and I did my diligence gladly, to give of that little. And the Lord shall answer, *Well done, thou good and faithful servant; thou hast been faithful in a few things; I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy Lord.*

To which blessed sentence, God, of his infinite mercy, grant we may all be happily entitled, through the merits and mediation of Jesus Christ. Amen.

S E R M O N CXXVIII.

The Duty of Masters to their Servants.

EPHES. vi. 9.

And ye, masters, do the same things unto them, forbearing threatening: knowing that your Master also is in heaven; neither is there respect of persons with him.

THE apostle having, in the foregoing verses, directed the duty of servants, and urged them to a conscientious discharge of it, from a sense of duty towards God, and the rewards that would await their fidelity from his hand; proceeds, in this verse, to enjoin the masters to do the same by them. Now, by doing the same, is not meant doing the very same things, but doing the same reciprocal duties; that is, as servants are to be faithful and just to their masters, and to perform all parts of their duty towards them, from a regard to conscience, and the rewards of a future state, so likewise are masters to do the same unto them; that is, to perform all the parts of their duty towards their servants, from the same motives and principles. *Forbearing threatening;* or rather, as the original word signifies, *remitting their threats;* that is, not always executing the harsh declarations they have made, or resolutions they have taken up against them; but refraining and receding from the severe sentences they have denounced in their wrath; remembering, that they also have a Master in heaven, whose will they also violate, and whose commands they disobey; and yet, should he execute his just vengeance upon their transgressions, *should he be extreme to mark what is done amiss, who might abide it?*

From the words thus explained, the business of this discourse shall be, to lay

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down the duty of masters to their servants in all its parts; and this I shall endeavour to do in the explanation and proof of the following propositions:

First, Masters are to do justice to their servants.

Secondly, They are to correct them in their faults.

Thirdly, They are to set them good example.

Fourthly, They are to allow them means of instruction in their duty towards God, and leisure to perform their duty.

And, lastly, They are to encourage them in well-doing.

First, I say, masters are to do justice to their servants; and this justice consists in two points; first, in not exacting immoderate and unreasonable labour at their hands; and, secondly, in an honest payment of their wages.

First, You are to require no more than an equal and moderate portion of labour from your servants: unlike those cruel Egyptian task-masters, who, as the text expresses it, *made the children of Israel to serve with rigour, and made their lives bitter with hard bondage*; and at last proceeded to that extremity of cruelty against them, that they exacted the same hard measure of work from them, without allowing them the materials necessary to the performance of it. *Ye shall no more give the people straw to make brick: let them go and gather straw for themselves; and the tale of the bricks which they did make heretofore, you shall lay upon them; you shall not diminish ought thereof; for they be idle.—For they be idle*; the common cry of all cruel and unmerciful masters, at the same time that their poor vassals are labouring out their lives in their drudgery. *A righteous man (saith Solomon) regardeth the life of his beast; but the tender mercies of the wicked are cruel.* A man that hath any degree of goodness or humanity, hath compassion for the beasts that perish; and, although they were made for his use, cannot bear to see them labour out their lives in pain and misery: much less can he bear to behold his own fellow-creatures, who were made in the image of God, and are, by nature, his own equals; much less can he behold them, panting and toiling to death in his own service; much less can he hasten their death, and make their *lives bitter with hard bondage*. This is the conduct of

the righteous; *but the tender mercies of the wicked are cruel.* And indeed there cannot possibly be a surer indication of abandoned corruption, of a disposition depraved to the last degree, than an hardened cruelty to those that are under our power! for he that has put off mercy, the noblest, the loveliest likeness of Almighty God here below, must, of necessity, put off all virtue and all goodness along with it. But let such wretched creatures remember that there is a God, who heareth the voice of the *poor, and the oppressed, when they cry unto him*, as he did the distressed Israelites, when they groaned beneath their bondage; there is a God that will visit their cruelty, as he did the cruelty of those merciless task-masters, with signal judgments, and severe vengeance.

I know it is a received opinion among many ignorant creatures, who are doomed to slavery, that they are never to cease from their toil in the presence of their masters. This my own experience has led me to observe; and, therefore, it is the duty of all masters, in that case, to let them know, that they do not expect incessant labour from them; forasmuch as no constitution can bear it; and if, at any time, the necessity of their affairs requires uncommon labour and application at the hands of their servants, it is their duty to devise, to contrive, all possible relief and refreshment for them under it, as well as to allow them double relaxation after it. God knows, a state of servitude is a state wretched enough, in its best circumstances; and, therefore, a good man should endeavour to lighten the burden, and, instead of adding to the calamities of life, should make it his study, by all possible methods, to ease and relieve them, to the utmost of his power.

The next point of justice that we owe to servants is, to pay them their wages honestly.

And, if justice be rightly defined, a *virtue that gives every one what of right belongs to him*, the virtue is never more itself, is never practised in greater perfection, than when it is employed in payments of this kind: for if the price of servitude be not a right, what is? If a man hath not a just claim to what he has earned by the sweat of his brow, there is no such thing as a just claim in the world. And yet it is but too notorious, that

that many men are so regardless of justice, as well as humanity, in this point, that they do not scruple, first, to screw down their servants' wages to a poor pittance, and then defraud them of that pittance. Little regarding the solemn commands of God to the contrary, and the just judgments he has denounced against this cruel injustice. *The wages of him that is hired, saith Moses, (Levit. xix. 13.) shall not abide with thee all night until the morning.* And again, (Deut. xxiv. 14, 15.) *Thou shalt not oppress an hired servant, that is poor and needy; at his day thou shalt give him his hire; neither shall the sun go down upon it, lest he cry against thee unto the Lord, and it be a sin unto thee.* Here we see, that we should be so far from defrauding our servants of their hire, that we are not to withhold the payment of it, even for one day; for, as the text saith, *he is poor, and setteth his heart upon it.* We cannot tell how strongly his necessities may call for it that moment; nor can we tell how much he may suffer for want of it; it is a trifle to us, but it is his all. It is the price of many long and anxious hours; and, therefore, *he setteth his heart upon it.* It is like Jacob's purchase of Rachael, dearly earned, and dearly loved; it is a happiness that cometh but seldom, and, therefore, it is inhuman to delay it; and much more to rob and defraud him entirely of it. A master, that had any humanity, would take delight to make his poor servant happy, as soon and as often as he could; and would regard the robbing the labourer of his hire, as the cruellest and most monstrous robbery in the world. But this is not all; for oppressing the labourer in his hire, however this be done, whether by defrauding him, or delaying payment, or screwing him down to such a miserable price as will not afford him the common comforts of life, or paying him in goods, which he must sell at half-value; all these, the last of these especially, is a crying sin, and one of the cruellest oppressions that ever was heard of; and, therefore, it is no wonder, if God, by the mouth of his prophet Malachi, denounces a speedy vengeance against so much cruelty: *And I will come near to you to judgment, saith the Lord (Mal. iii. 5.); and I will be a swift witness against the sorcerers, and against the adulterers, and against false swearers, and against those that oppress the*

hireling in his wages. And, certainly, if we had but a moderate degree of good-nature, joined to common honesty, we should be so far from oppressing the hireling, by diminishing his just demands, that we should rather add to them; we should take delight to see our poor dependents thrive and prosper, and become happy under us. For, surely, the most glorious power and use of wealth is, to diffuse joy, and health, and happiness wherever we come. That noble emblem of Nebuchadnezzar (Dan. iv.) should, in some measure, be that of every man of power and wealth in the world. A flourishing fortune should, in this respect, resemble a flourishing well-grown tree; *as it grows great and strong, as the leaves thereof are fair, so should the fruit thereof be much;* and it should be *meat for many:* these are its noblest uses; to relieve and to refresh, to protect from storm and tempest, and project a salutary shade and shelter all around it. And yet some of the great trees of our earth are, in the very reverse of this character, of so malignant an influence, that they keep down and kill all that come under them; and, for that reason, should, like the fruitless tree in the gospel, be *cut down; why cumbereth it the ground?* And, indeed, it may but too truly be said of them, not only, why cumbereth, but also, why curseth it the ground? And, no doubt, in the just judgments of Almighty God, they are oftentimes not only *cut down* for that reason, *but also cast into the fire.*

The second duty masters owe their servants is, to correct them in their faults; and this they are to do, not in such violence, and heat of passion, as may overset their reason, and carry their correction to excess; nor yet with such a stoic calmness, as might make it be mistaken for deliberate cruelty; but with a temperate degree of just and reasonable resentment, and such as may convince their servants of the evil and error of their conduct. For servants are at all times apt enough to imagine, their masters only correct them to gratify their own ill-nature, or ill-humour, without any regard to their amendment; and, therefore, some pains should be taken to remove this prejudice, and to satisfy our servants, that our reproofs are meant for their good; and that we take much more pleasure in seeing them do their duty as they ought, than

in punishing them for the neglect of it. And this will make the duty of servants to their masters, like the duty of mankind to Almighty God, at once an happy, and a reasonable service. But, if this will not do, as, God knows, many of them are insensible to all rational methods of conviction, then sharper and severer methods are to be made use of; and, indeed, some servants are of such rough and intractable dispositions, so haughty, and so hardened, that they are not to be subdued otherwise than as we are told a great captain subdued rocks, by fire and vinegar. But, although severity be necessary sometimes, care should be taken never to use it, but when it is necessary; and, therefore, that teizing vexatious humour of some masters is carefully to be avoided, that dwells eternally upon a fault, and delights in perpetual taunts and insults, upon the conduct and character of such as are in subjection to them. This, as it is hateful and inhuman, so likewise it is a servile disposition; and is a sure argument of an abject mean mind.

But to proceed.

The point where servants have most need of correction and admonition, and yet meet with least of it, is in relation to their duty to God. Men are apt enough to chastise neglect and error in the conduct of their servants, as far as it regards their own concerns; but the concerns of Almighty God, the interest of religion and virtue, are of less moment with them. And yet, in reality, the dishonour done to Almighty God, and the eternal ruin of the meanest mortal, consequent to that dishonour, are, in themselves, of infinitely more importance than all the concerns of this world put together. Will any loss of this world bear any comparison with the loss of an immortal soul! or any mortal gain weigh against that of saving a soul alive! And, therefore, when masters are immediately on fire for every transgression and neglect of their own will and pleasure, and, at the same time, cold and unmoved at the greatest enormities against the righteous and unerring will of God; it is a sure sign that they have great regard to their own interest, and very little for the glory of God, and the salvation of souls. And, indeed, this is the great and crying complaint in the conduct of masters! their

utter disregard of the religion and virtue of their servants! And, to this lamentable neglect, so extensive and universal, is owing the present general corruption among the lower part of mankind. It is notorious, that servants are, at this day, the most abandoned and profligate part of the creation! and, when these marry, or, which is much more frequent, become parents by their crimes, their wretched issue are brought up without any sense of conscience, or fear of God! for how should they inspire any sense of religion into their children, who are utterly void of it themselves? And thus the lower part of mankind go on from ignorance to iniquity, and are, at this moment, arrived to such an unspeakable degree of corruption as is amazing to behold, and dreadful to think of! such as were sufficient to draw down God's heaviest judgments upon the land; so that we may cry out against this nation, as Isaiah does against the Jews, in the first chapter of his prophecy, *Ah! sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, a seed of evil-doers, children that are corrupters! They have provoked the Holy One of Israel unto anger; they are gone away backward.* And to what is all this abomination, all this dreadful mass of iniquity, so justly to be ascribed, as to the neglect of masters? Their conniving at the profaneness and irreligion of their servants, and entirely neglecting, either to exhort them to virtue and goodness, or to oblige them to a constant attendance upon the service of God. And, surely, masters of families would never be so careless in an affair of this consequence, did they consider what a severe account they shall give of this conduct at the last. All masters of families are governors and rulers in their own houses; and it is the duty of rulers to watch over the conduct of all persons under their care; especially those parts of it that are of the last consequence to them; and, therefore, as all rulers should be the *ministers of God for good*, so should they likewise be a *terror to evil works*. That this was David's sense of the matter, appears from the 101st Psalm, where he solemnly professes, that he will employ none but the righteous in his service, and will not allow any wicked persons to be parts of his family. *He that walketh in a perfect way, he shall serve me. He that worketh deceit shall not dwell within my house.*

house. He that telleth lies, shall not tarry in my sight. And, as this is the duty of all masters, as much as it was David's, so likewise is it no less their interest; and this upon two accounts; first, with regard to their children; and, secondly, with regard to their fortune.

First, With regard to their children; for, as few parents have leisure, or are able wholly to take care of their children themselves, there is often a necessity of committing them to the care of servants; and it is certain, that, according as those servants are either wicked or well-inclined, the child is early initiated, either in the ways of virtue, or in the ways of vice; and, as earlier habits last longer, and are harder to be defaced, if parents have any regard either to the happiness of their children in this world or their salvation in the next, nothing ought to be of nearer concern to them than to commit them to the care of virtuous and religious servants in their tender years.

As to the other point, surely nothing can be more the interest of all masters of families, than that all their servants should make a conscience of their business, and should perform all parts of their duty to them *in singleness of heart, as unto Christ.* And, therefore, the sure way to make them good servants is to make them good men and good Christians; and the sure way to make them good Christians is, besides what hath been already urged, to shew them good example, which was the third thing I proposed to speak to.

Masters should set their servants a good example. Example sways the whole world, and either ruins or reforms it, as it is good or evil! as kingdoms are influenced by the example of the prince, and armies by the example of their captains, and all societies of men by such as have authority over them; families naturally fall into the imitation of their fathers, and servants are led insensibly into the manners of their masters. A good example is like a light set up on high, to guide mankind in the ways of salvation and truth; and, therefore, our blessed Saviour commands his disciples, and in them all Christians, *Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.* The light of a good life is, indeed, a silent, but it is at the same time a strong, a living, and almost an

irresistible exhortation to goodness; its native beauty attracts the love and admiration of all that behold it; and what men admire, they imitate. And if good example hath force enough to draw men to the imitation of it, alas! ill example hath yet a stronger and mightier influence; it prevails even against exhortation and instruction; and it is vain for an ill man to exhort to virtue and goodness, as long as his practice contradicts his precepts; for it is much easier to ruin by example than to reform by precept; as it is far easier to pull down than to build up. And, therefore, it is vain for a lewd, a profane, an idle, and drunken master to expect a modest, a sober, an industrious, and a pious family. And, indeed, how can a wicked master so much as expect that a servant should be faithful to him, for the little pittance he receives from him, when he himself is so notoriously ungrateful and unfaithful to God, in return for all the blessings of life? If you expect your servants should be honest and good men, let them see you go to church constantly, and behave yourselves with becoming humility and devotion when you are there; let them see you act honestly and conscientiously in all your dealings; let them not observe you habitually careles to retire into your closet to your morning and evening devotions; or rather (not merely to insist upon negative goodness, or ceasing to do evil) let them observe you religiously careful to call your whole family together, to join with you in the worship of God; let them never hear a loose expression, a rash oath, or a profane jest out of your mouths; *Let your light so shine before them, that they may see your good works,* and then will they be naturally led to *glorify your Father which is in heaven.* And, surely, there cannot be a more lovely, there cannot be so lovely, so glorious an employment in life, as that of leading in the ways of salvation and truth, and conducting to eternal happiness. *Captain of our salvation,* is the most glorious title that ever was conferred even upon the Son of God! and, if so, certainly the contrary to all this, the conductor to vice and villany, the leader to death and destruction, is the dreadfulest employment, as well as the most hateful character in life.

But, fourthly, as masters are to admonish servants in the ways of their duty,

and to set them good example, so likewise are they to allow them means of instruction, and leisure to perform their duty towards God. And this may be done at small expence, both of time and money, by allowing every member of your family a Bible and Prayer-book, together with the Whole Duty of Man; and, if that be too great an expence, allowing one of each to the family in common. And, as the rates of these excellent books are, by the pious charity of some good men, reduced very low, this is an expence that most families can well bear; or, if any are yet so poor as not to be able to go to this small expence, I am satisfied that, by a modest application to their parish minister, such an invaluable treasure might be easily obtained; and, when it is obtained, a very small portion of leisure allowed to the servants for reading and contemplation, at proper seasons, will be sufficient for their instruction in that which should be the great business of life, their duty both to God and man; and this may be done on holidays, and other seasons of leisure; or, if an hour or two were now and then allowed to servants for this very purpose, as an extraordinary reward of diligence, possibly it might turn to very good account. And, be assured, one hour thus employed will bring a blessing upon all the rest. Or, if this be more than the necessary business of your calling will allow, (as I am satisfied it is not,) the Sabbath is the Lord's; let that, at least, be allowed your servants, for their instruction in the ways of salvation and life; and let it not only be allowed, but see that it also be employed in hearing of sermons, and attending upon the public worship of God; and, above all, take care they are not withheld from the service of God, by being employed in the service of your luxury, vices, and vanities, as is too often the case of cooks and coachmen! and, if they are sometimes withheld by the necessary duties of their place, be it your care to see those omissions made up by a diligent attendance at other seasons.

The last duty of masters is to encourage their servants in well-doing.

Rewards and punishments are the great springs and wheels that set the whole world in motion; there is hardly any thing to be done in life without the aid of one or both of these. And foras-

much as there is a pride in human nature that often sets itself against correction, and is restive to reproofs, but pliant and yielding to the least expressions of kindness, it is frequently found, that applause and encouragement have more influence upon us than correction and punishment. Pride is like the rust that seizes and stiffens the spring of an engine, and checks its motion, so that no force can set it to work; but kindness is like oil, which smooths and supple the machine in such a manner that the parts move of themselves. And this gentle method of dealing with our fellow-creatures is God's own method of dealing with mankind; who, we are assured, *doth not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men; who delighteth not in the death of a sinner, but rather that he should turn from his wickedness, and live;* and chooseth rather to lead us to repentance by his goodness, than to drive us to it by his wrath. And, as prudence and humanity prompt us to take this method of exciting our servants to duty, so justice and equity require, that when they have excelled in it they should be rewarded and encouraged to the utmost of our power; for the same motives that excited them to excel are the best engagements upon them to continue in well-doing. And, God knows, when a servant is truly faithful and diligent in the discharge of his duty, all the encouragement in our power is justly due to him. And, to speak reasonably upon this head, when a man lays out his whole time and care in our service, and makes it the study and business of his life to consult our happiness and our interest, how can such a servant be too much encouraged? or rather, how can he be rewarded enough?

And yet, after all, I am sensible there is one objection to this doctrine, which I do not well know how to get over; and that is, that the greater part of servants will not bear to be encouraged, but are wont to grow so insolent, as soon as their masters have shewn any uncommon regard to them, that they immediately become intolerable, not only to their fellow-servants, but even to their masters themselves. For it is the nature of servile spirits to be either low and creeping, to a fault; or imperious and proud, beyond bearing; and, in truth, I am at a loss what to say upon this head, or what method of conduct to prescribe in relation

to such dispositions as these, unless we imitate the conduct of Almighty God, who *resisteth the proud, but giveth grace to the lowly*. If servants always found that they constantly rose in their master's favour in proportion to their modesty and humility, and, on the other hand, found that every degree of pride threw them into as great a degree of disgrace, this, joined to proper instruction and admonition, would probably have happy effects upon their dispositions. But, in truth, the great evil, which is the foundation of all this pride and perverseness, is the want of a right sense of religion and virtue. If they once knew that humility would make them amiable in the sight of God and man, and that pride would render them detestable to both, they would soon study to obtain the one, and to avoid the other; would earnestly seek after *the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which, in the sight of God, is of great price*; and, above all, they would remember those two fine observations of Solomon, one in the 29th chapter of his Proverbs, and the other in the 16th chapter: *A man's pride shall bring him low, but honour shall uphold the humble in spirit. Pride goeth before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall*. And these proverbs I would recommend to all servants to bear about them, like jewels of inestimable value, and repeat them with their prayers, as the surest charms, not only to preserve them in their places, but likewise keep them in favour both with God and man.

But there are two instances of encouragement, which I have not yet mentioned; and those are, the regard that should be had to the merits of a good servant in the last wills of the masters, and when the servant is past his labour.

As to the first of these: Forasmuch as the small pittance which is paid to servants, under the name of wages, is, God knows, but a poor reward for fidelity and diligence, it is the duty of a master to remember a good servant in his last will; to make the best provision he can for him, against that time when it will be no longer in his power either to reward his fidelity or relieve his wants; and, therefore, I would have a dutiful and conscientious servant always considered in the next degree to a dutiful child, and before a child that was undutiful; agreeably to the wise man's rule, (Prov. xvii. 20.) *A wise serv-*

ant shall bear rule over a son that causeth shame, and shall have part of the inheritance.

As to the second point; to wit, the regard due to a servant when he is past his labour; I think there cannot be a greater instance of cruelty and inhumanity, than to suffer an aged servant, who hath spent the vigour of his youth and health in our service, to be reduced to misery and want, when his infirmities have disabled him from further labour. Humanity would prompt us to take some care, even of a brute, in the same circumstances; for a brute, that had laboured out his strength in our service, that he might not want pasture and shelter for the poor remains of his life; and, surely, much more should it oblige us to take some care of our poor fellow-creatures, of an aged and a faithful servant, in the decline of life. Methinks I hear the old servant crying out to his master in this condition, as David doth to his God in the 71st Psalm; *Cast me not away in the time of age; forsake me not when my strength faileth me*.

The cases of sickness, or accidental loss of limbs, in our service, which disable from labour, fall also under this head; and are rather more calamitous than the case of old age; and, consequently, call at least for equal compassion and humanity at our hands: and, therefore, the cruelty of those masters is never to be forgiven, who make the misery and misfortunes of their servants, reasons for casting them off. With what face can such creatures cry out to God in their own calamity, as David doth in his distress, *Turn thee unto me, and have mercy upon me, for I am desolate, and in misery? O! go not far from me; for trouble is hard at hand, and there is none to help me*. Therefore, my beloved brethren, *be ye merciful, as your Father, which is in heaven, is merciful*, and fail not to shew all the pity and compassion to your poor servants which you yourselves hope for, and will have need of, at the hand of God, your great Lord and Master.

And thus I have done with the several branches of the duty of masters to their servants; and have shewed, I hope, to your satisfaction, first, That you are to do justice to them in paying them their wages punctually and honestly, and not laying more labour upon them than they are able to bear.

Secondly, That you are to correct them in their faults; and that in such a manner as is most likely to avail for their amendment, especially such faults as are committed against the law of God; such as lying, swearing, profaneness, lewdness, and all vices and immoralities whatsoever; and this you must do, as well for their salvation-sake, as also to guard your children from the infection of their manners, who, if your servants are corrupt, will hardly escape being tainted by them.

Thirdly, I shewed you, that you were obliged to set your servants good examples, by honesty and conscience in all your dealings, and by an exemplary life of piety and virtue.

Fourthly, That you were to allow them proper means of instruction in their duty to God and man; the use of Bibles, and other books of devotion, and a proper portion of time to peruse them; the Sabbath, especially set apart for this end, is not only freely to be allowed them, but care is to be taken that it be employed by them in hearing sermons, and attending upon the public worship of God.

And, in the last place, as you are to correct your servants in vice and error, so are you to encourage them in well-doing; to support them when they are past their labour; and make the best provision you can for them at your death; and the consequence from all this will be, that your lives will be easier, and your business be infinitely better done, than otherwise they ever would, or ever will be.

And now, my brethren, if ye know all these parts of your duty, *happy are ye, if you do them.*

And, indeed, you ought to do them from the sole motive mentioned in my text, knowing, *that ye also have a Master in heaven, neither is there respect of persons with him.* The little temporary distinctions of lord and master are calculated only for this world; for, in the world to come, all titles shall vanish, and all distinctions cease, and mankind shall be reduced to their original equality: high and low, rich and poor, the master and the servant, all shall be summoned before the great tribunal of God! all shall appear alike, without precedence, and without distinction, other than what their merit shall give them in the sight of God; with regard to every thing else, equal, as in the grave they rose from.

Good God! how strangely, how entirely, and how sadly will the state of things here below be reversed and changed at the great day of account! when the mighty men of the earth shall be stripped of all their ornaments and honours, and the title of *good and faithful servant* shall be the highest and noblest distinction! Then shall the sons of vanity see themselves reduced to a level with their meanest slaves; and not only so, but shall see some of those slaves placed high above them. How will their proud hearts be mortified, to behold those poor wretches, wretches whom they would now scarce vouchsafe to look down upon, exalted to high degrees of honour and eminence, and themselves reduced to the lowest condition of misery and contempt! so low, that those very slaves shall pity them! so low, as, perhaps, to beg a small charity from the meanest of their creatures; as the rich man in the Gospel, who *was clothed in purple, and fared sumptuously every day*, was reduced to beg relief by the hand of that wretched creature, whose *sores the dogs licked at his gate!* to beg, *that Abraham would send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in cold water, to cool his tongue.* How many haughty masters will be reduced to the like sad estate at the last day; suing to their slaves, and suing, as he did, to be denied; and receiving, instead of relief, the same severe return, *Thou, in thy life-time, receivedst thy good things, and this, thy slave, evil things, at thy hands; but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented!*

Therefore, my beloved brethren, let your loins be girded about, and your lights burning, and ye yourselves like unto men that wait for their lord. Oh! set not your hearts upon the little temporary distinctions of lord and master, but remember that *your Master is also in heaven; neither is there respect of persons with him.* Remember, that the meanest slave upon earth is upon the same foot of natural equality, and of equal acceptance in the sight of God, with the mightiest monarch in the universe; all equally the sons of God, and heirs of everlasting salvation. What are all the wealth and power of this world upon which we so vainly value ourselves? What are they but great stewardships, of which the owners shall give a severe account at the last day? What then is the great business of

of life, but to provide, that we may be-
have ourselves so in this account, that,
at the last, we may be found in the cha-
racter of that faithful and wise *steward*
in the Gospel, *whom his lord shall make*
ruler over his household, to give them their
portion of meat in due season. Blessed is that
servant whom his lord, when he cometh,
shall find so doing. But, if that servant
shall say in his heart, my lord delayeth his
coming, and shall begin to beat his fellow-
servants, and to eat and drink, and be drunk-
en, the lord of that servant shall come in a
day when he looketh not for him, and at an
hour when he is not aware; and shall cut
him asunder, and appoint him his portion
with the unbelievers.

From which dreadful and intolerable
doom, God, of his great mercy, deliver
all that hear me; through the merits
and mediation of Jesus Christ, our only
Saviour. Amen.

SERMON CXXIX.

The Duty of paying Debts.

ROM. xiii. part of ver. 8.

Owe no man any thing, but to love one another.

THE apostle, having in the foregoing
verse enjoined us to render to every
one their dues—*Tribute to whom tribute,*
custom to whom custom, honour to whom
honour; subjoins as an enforcement of the
same precept in other terms—*Owe no man*
any thing. He first expresseth the precept
positively; *Render to every one their dues;*
and then, to enforce it yet stronger, he
varies his phrase, and lays down the same
precept a second time, in negative terms
—*Owe no man any thing—Owe no man any*
thing, but to love one another; i. e. dis-
charge every engagement, every obliga-
tion you are under, to every man, in
every relation of life; take care you owe
no man any thing but love and good-will;
for that is a debt, which, though you
always pay, yet you will always owe;
that is an obligation that never ends but
with your life.

The precept here delivered is general,
and extends to every instance of social
virtue; but the business of this discourse
shall be to apply it to one particular duty,
which is as little practised, and perhaps
less taught, than any other; I mean the
duty of paying debts; a duty of as great
consequence to the well-being of society, as

any other whatsoever; as comprehending
under it one great and important branch of
commutative justice; and yet as utterly and
as openly disregarded, as if neither the laws
of God, nor man, nor nature exacted it of
us. And therefore, to awaken you into a
right sense of this duty, I shall consider the
evils that attend the neglect of it, both
as they regard the debtor, and as they
regard the creditor.

And, first, with regard to the debtor.
—Nothing is more manifest than that
carelessness in contracting debts, and ne-
gligence in discharging them, is one of
the most unhappy characters in life, and
such as draws more evils after it, than
can well be counted or conceived: that
spirit, as it is the effect, so it is the cause
of extravagance. Money borrowed is so
much clear gains to a thoughtless mortal
that has nothing but the gratification of
his pleasures at heart; and with how
much more ease, and less interruption,
this may be done, the better. The con-
sequences of such a conduct are reflec-
tions, which can only proceed from that
wisdom which they openly despise, or are
utterly incapable of. This, of necessity,
gives them up a prey to the artifices of
wily villains, that lie in wait to deceive;
for there are those in the world whose
whole business and purpose of life is to
watch and to feed the follies of such ex-
travagants: they give by ounces, that
they may receive by pounds. They are
in the condition of the husbandman,
who commits his seed to the earth, in
prospect of a good harvest, greater or
less, according to the richness of the
soil. They well know that the persons
they deal with are bad computers, and
worse accountants; and therefore no-
thing is more easy than to impose upon
them in the value of what they vend, or
the quantity of what they receive. And
if they should at any time happen to be
restive, and suspect they are defrauded,
the men of the world know very well
how to bring them down again to their
own terms: they manage them as skilful
warriors subdue strong towns; they starve
them into compliance: they know it is but
holding their hand, and refusing to feed their
extravagance, to make them subscribe to
any conditions they think fit to impose.

How far do these men outdo the folly
of Esau! He sold his birthright to gratify
a real and craving want, and yet he sinned
in

in selling it; but these men sacrifice theirs to such wants as are false and fantastic; to appetites that will not be satisfied, or at least ought not to be indulged: nay, they oftentimes sacrifice their health, as well as their inheritance, even to wantonness and fulness. The truth of it is, men of this character are, for the most part, in a worse condition than that of Solomon's horse-leech, that *hath two daughters, crying, Give, give.* Wine and women, play and pleasure, are the daughters of the horse-leech, less limited in their number, but not less craving, wasting, and insatiable; and whoever suffers them to fasten on him is effectually undone. If men contracted debts for the necessities of life, which they could no otherwise procure, they were excusable; but to purchase needles, nay perhaps pernicious vanities, at the hazard of health, and fortune, and liberty; at the hazard of every thing that is good and valuable in life, is folly past forgiveness! and yet, if it were only a folly, it might be borne with. But, in truth, this habit of running thoughtlessly into debt draws many other worse habits after it; lying, swearing, cheating, and all kinds of vice and villany are its sure attendants; nay, sometimes, even murder, and an open defiance of public justice, as hath been seen in more than one unhappy and dreadful instance. It is like that evil spirit in the Gospel, who, when he hath gotten possession, taketh with him seven other spirits more wicked than himself; and they enter in, and dwell there; *and the last state of that man is unspeakably worse than the first.*

A spirit of extravagance, long used to be indulged, cannot bear to be restrained or refused; and if it may not be gratified in the usual way, yet gratified it must be, at any rate. If credit be checked in the common course, new channels must be cut, and new sources opened; and this must be the work of falsehood and fraud, and every wicked artifice that can be devised. By this means the mind becomes corrupt and depraved to the last degree, and the man is gradually fitted for the conversation of fiends. Nay, this sin is as stupid with regard to this world as other sins are with regard to the next; it sacrifices all the solid and lasting satisfactions even of this life, to small, present, momentary gratifications, without

the least thought of the dreadful consequences that await them; and it ends, even in this world, as other vices do in the next, in the loss of liberty and happiness, and the calamities of a dreadful confinement among cursed spirits! for a gaol is, indeed, another hell upon earth, and the best emblem of that mansion of misery; where you are surrounded with nothing but sin and affliction; where abandoned wretches become yet more abandoned by society and example; by the conversation of miscreants more vile than themselves; by mixing with the most corrupt and profligate part of mankind; inflaming their past guilt by new and greater enormities every day; living in utter defiance of God and goodness; and, for the most part, dying either in a hardened impenitence, or the horrors of despair. And yet this is the end to which the young, the gay, the pleasurable part of mankind are hurrying on, with as much eagerness, as if they thought it impossible ever to be attained too soon. And, indeed, if this were only the pursuit of youthful folly, the evil were in some degree to be endured, because age and experience would be sure to abate it; but, in truth, it is often the vice of every age, and every condition in life—wherever pride and vanity reign, there extravagant aims are pursued, and fantastic distinctions sought after, at the hazard of every felicity and security in life. Turn your eyes upon the world, and you will behold one half of mankind living apparently above their fortune; and what is living above their fortune, but living to sure destruction, both of themselves and family, as well as all those they deal with? One man is above making use of the limbs which God hath bestowed upon him, to convey him where his business calls; and so rides in a coach for a few months, at the hazard of wanting shoes for the rest of his life, when his folly hath reduced him to his feet.

Another, who hath wherewithal to purchase a house, every way convenient and suited to his circumstances, cannot be content without magnificence, and rooms of state, which are of no use, but to be looked at: these are not to be attained without a foreign fund; and, just when the building is at the point of being finished, his creditors come and take possession of it, and he and his family are turned out

out of doors—and, perhaps, without clothes enough to cover their nakedness, or hide their shame; it may be, too, without knowing how to be sheltered from the inclemency of the weather, or where to seek for a morsel of bread. This is oftener the case, in effect, though not exactly in the circumstances now mentioned, than is commonly imagined; nor are the instances few or rare, of persons utterly undone by living beyond their fortune. In this condition, abandoned at once by their friends, and by the fund or income by which they subsisted, deserted by every thing but their pride, whither shall the unhappy wretches turn themselves? Their vanity sets them above all honest industry in a low way; for that, for the most part, remains with them like a running sore that drains their vitals; and either urges them to starve in an honourable way, or drives them to violent and desperate courses for subsistence, till they end in infamy. And although such a creature is little to be pitied upon his own account, yet is his fall often to be lamented, on account of many others that are involved in his ruin. An honest friend that was drawn in to be bound for him, and is undone by his beneficence; or an innocent family that were too young to be partners in his folly, and yet must share his fate, and are given up by it to prostitution or poverty; or an honest and kind parent, who expended more than he could well afford, to bring his son with more advantage into the world; perhaps, too, a virtuous and a valuable woman, innocent of his pride, and yet crushed in his fall; though, it is to be hoped, this rarely happens, the wife being too often the great incentive to the husband's vanity; and, of consequence, less to be lamented in the ruin in which she is involved. These, and a thousand such like calamities, are the necessary and unavoidable consequences of profusion and extravagance; of carelessness in contracting debts, and negligence in discharging them; these are the evils which thoughtless mortals draw upon their own heads, and those of their nearest friends, by vanity and unthrift. And yet, great and various as these are, they are few and inconsiderable, in comparison of those brought upon the rest of mankind by the same cursed spirit,

Every one knows that the whole business of trade, by which nations grow great and happy, is carried on by men of diligence and industry, of fortunes, for the most part, too small (at least, at their first setting out) to support them in indolence; and that their profit arises principally from quick returns. It is plain, from hence, that running in debt with tradesmen, and neglecting to pay them in due time, is utterly ruinous to the whole business of trade and commerce; and absolutely destructive of the very principles upon which it is built, and by which it subsists; and yet this is a crime every day committed by men of fortune and quality, with as little remorse as they eat and drink; and, if the tradesman demands his money, it is odds but he is either threatened, or turned into a jest: the son of Sirach's wise observation is here every day verified; *The rich man hath done wrong, and yet he threateneth; the poor is wronged, and yet he must entreat also.* If threats will not rid these men of their importunate creditors, then are they to be deluded with fair words, and plausible excuses, to pay attendance from day to day, to the loss of more time, and neglect of more business, than perhaps the debt is worth; and so the first injury, instead of being repaired, is doubled. And yet the gentleman debtor, the author of this evil, is so far from repenting of it, that it is odds but he vaunts his wit and dexterity in doing it. *As a madman (saith Solomon) who casteth firebrands, arrows, and death; so is the man that deceiveth his neighbour, and saith, Am I not in jest?*—And, indeed, it is scarce to be conceived how any man can deal more destruction and ruin around him, than by deceiving and breaking faith with the fair trader; for it is well known, his credit, his whole subsistence, depends upon keeping his word, and being strictly punctual in his payments and his promises; and, if he fail in these, he is undone at once. And how is it possible he should not fail, if the gentlemen he deals with fail him? He hath no way of raising money but by sale of his goods; and, if those to whom they are trusted will not pay him, it is impossible he can pay his creditors; and, if he do not pay them, it is impossible but he must be ruined, and, perhaps, many more with him. For traders are linked

linked and dependent of one another; and one man's fall throws down many more with him; the shopkeeper is in debt to the maker or the merchant; and these again to the journeyman, the farmer, or the foreign correspondent; and so the ruin becomes complicated, and extended beyond imagination! insomuch that the failure of one man here may affect many others in the remotest regions of the earth; may reach at once from west to east, and from east to west again; and yet the fine gentleman, that thus scattereth firebrands, arrows, and death around him, shall cry, with great complacency to himself, and, perhaps, with great applause from his companions, *Am I not in jest?* shall pride himself in having imposed upon the credulity of an industrious honest man, (with the added insolence of a contemptuous name,) and appointed him to come for payment the next day after he is gone out of town. And, after all, to what purpose all this fraud, and falsehood, and delusion! none in nature, but to have wherewithal to feed their folly and extravagance; to have to throw away upon a horse, or an harlot; or to pay a play debt—debts of honour as they are called, but, in truth, debts of infamy! debts, which it was infamous to contract, and which it is villanous to pay, to the injury of the honest trader. A gamester, a sharper, that undoes you with false dice, or sleight of hand; a wretch, whom it is a scandal to converse or so much as to be seen with, such a miscreant shall be paid off, though to your utter ruin: every engagement, every security in life, shall be sacrificed to discharge him; whilst the fair dealer that supplied you with the necessaries of life is left to rot in a gaol, for the food that fed you, and the clothes that covered you. Can any thing be conceived more monstrous? or is it possible to imagine how human nature can be sunk into a greater degree of corruption than this?

These are the practices of the loose and libertine part of mankind; and, indeed, what better can be expected from that vicious and thoughtless extravagance in which they live? But there is also another race of men, opposite to these in all other respects, who agree perfectly with them, in not paying their debts, and yet are much more criminal on that score; I mean the needy and covetous rich, who

cannot pay, either because they have made a new purchase, or because they will not break a sum for which they receive interest. A greedy purchaser is one that will run in debt with all mankind; and, if he can help it, will pay for nothing but houses or lands; nay, by his good will, he will not pay for these, otherwise than by the profits that arise from them. The thoughtless libertine is a man that spends more than he hath, and therefore cannot pay: the greedy purchaser is a man that spends nothing, and hath a great deal, and will not pay, because he would have more: these are the greatest monsters in nature! compositions of covetousness and cruelty! who oppress and distress every one they have to deal with; who will pay no man themselves, and yet suffer no mortal to owe them a penny; they rack their tenants, and grind the face of the poor; *they drive away the ass of the fatherless, (saith Job,) and take the widow's ox for a pledge; they cause the naked to lodge without clothing, and they have no covering in the cold; they are wet with the showers of the mountains, and embrace the rock for shelter; men groan from out of the city, and the soul of the wounded crieth out.* These men are the pest of society, and infinitely worse than robbers upon the high roads: they rob, not from necessity, but from the insolence of power and plenty! in the spirit of calm cruelty and determined villany! and, to complete their character, they rob oftentimes even under the shew of friendship, with impunity, and without remorse: neither can you guard against them; neither can you bring them to justice when you are injured. And here the condition of the creditor is indeed deplorable; if the tradesman be importunate for his money, he is sure to disoblige; if it be kept from him for a considerable time, he must of necessity be a great loser, because he is deprived of the advantage of turning it in trade all that while. Whereas, if it had been paid him when it ought, he might reasonably hope to have doubled it before that day. And yet, as the case now stands, he has not the advantage of receiving so much as the common interest for it; nay, not only so, but if he lets it lie above a certain number of years, he loses the principal. It is to be presumed, that one reason why the law allows no interest for book-debts, is, because the

trader

trader cannot afford to let his money lie out so long as to derive any advantage from it by way of interest; for the interest of money is but a trifle, in comparison of the advantages it may turn to in trade; and therefore the law, to lay tradesmen under a necessity of calling in their money betimes, allows them no interest for it while it is out. But still the difficulty remains how to call it in, since every one knows that the expences of a law-suit may very easily exceed the debt; and, at best, you must of necessity be a loser even by gaining your cause. If indeed the law, at the same time that it prohibited book-debts from bearing interest, had contrived some cheap and easy method of recovering those debts, tradesmen had been well dealt by; but to take away the interest of their debts, and the principal, after some years, and yet leave them no way of doing themselves justice, but at the hazard of their ruin, hath the appearance of great hardship. For, besides the excessive expence of law-suits, the ill-will that such an attempt is sure to draw upon the tradesman is a weight which few men of that rank are able to bear. The man he goes to law with, and all his friends and dependents, are sure to become his mortal enemies from that moment. The debtor, in that case, seems to think himself obliged to abuse the tradesman, and blast his credit as much as in him lies, to justify himself in using him so ill; and blasting a tradesman's credit is the sure way to ruin him at once. It is finely observed of an excellent writer, that credit is to the tradesman what honour is to the gentleman; to a man that is truly such, his honour is as dear as his life; to the trader, credit is as life itself, for he cannot live without it. Few of you would knowingly and deliberately involve yourselves in the guilt of murder; and yet you effectually do this, when you blast the reputation of an honest dealer; for defamation is death to such a one; his bread depends upon his credit, and if he be robbed of it he must starve; and, certainly, stabbing a man to the heart is a much less cruelty than starving him to death. Nay, you are as cruel to your own honour in this case as you are to the tradesman's credit and life; for honour is a strict and nice regard to every virtue in life, and more particularly to truth and justice. And therefore a

man of honour that is neither true nor honest, is a contradiction in terms; a man that allows himself in any degree of fraud or falsehood has actually degraded himself from his dignity, and has no more title to the honour than he has to the estate he has forfeited.

But, suppose the tradesman's reputation so well established as to bear up against the load of calumny that is thrown upon him on these occasions; suppose him able to bear the double burden of calumny and a law-suit; yet what will all this avail him? The debtor is a peer, or a parliament-man, or protected by those that are; his person is privileged, and his estate settled; and, if neither of these will do, he bids defiance to the very execution of the law; and you attempt it at the hazard of your life. These are the difficulties that shopkeepers and men in business are forced to struggle with, and too often sink under; and if, in the number of so many bad paymasters as they have to deal with, some should be so far touched with compassion or remorse, as not only to discharge what they owe, but likewise to pay interest for it, beyond the obligation of the law, this is reckoned an uncommon mark of liberality and Christian heroism; whereas, in truth, a dealer that is kept out of his money a considerable time hath no sufficient reparation made him by being paid both the principal and the interest in the end; because both together will be far from amounting to the profit he might reasonably propose to have made by it in trade all that time. For sure no man in his wits would run all the hazards and troubles of trade, who could propose to make as much advantage by the common interest of money as he might expect from dealing with it. And this is a new reason why men should be careful to pay tradesmen in time; because though no accident should hinder you from paying them in the end, yet your clearing off the original debt, together with the legal interest which that sum ought to bear, is far from doing justice to the tradesman, for the damage he has suffered in being kept out of his money so long. So that, when you think you have made him ample amends for detaining what was due to him, you have in truth injured him.

And thus I have endeavoured to lay before you the several evils that arise from

from running thoughtlessly into debt, and from delaying to pay when it is in our power. And yet this is a vice so universally practised, and so little thought of in the world, that I cannot quit the subject without making some application of what has been said, to all orders and degrees of men that allow themselves in it.

S E R M O N CXXX.

The same Subject continued.

ROM. xiii. part of ver. 8.

Owe no man any thing, but to love one another.

IN a former discourse upon these words, I laid down the duty of paying debts, together with the evils which attend the neglect of it, both as they regard the debtor, and as they regard the creditor. The evils to the debtor, of being imposed upon either in the quantity or value of what they take up upon trust; and the great evil of making expence easy, and, in consequence of that, ruin insensible and inevitable. To the creditor, the delay of payment in due time draws endless inconveniencies and evils after it; loss of time, and trade, and credit, and, in consequence of these, inevitable, and, it may be, extensive and complicated ruin. I now proceed to make some application of what has been said, to all orders and degrees of men that allow themselves in the violation or neglect of this duty. And, first, let me ask the thoughtless spendthrift once again, what can be the consequence of his running in debt with all the world, but utter ruin both to himself and others? If the persons you deal with are honest and indigent, how can you answer it to your humanity, to bring misery and destruction upon the most pitiable and most deserving part of the creation? to destroy those by your extravagance, which even cruelty and tyranny would be tender of? What is most provoking, and indeed insufferable upon this head, is, that those who allow themselves in this conduct often pass upon the world under the character of good-natured men; and you shall often hear it said of such a one, that he is no-body's enemy but his own. But the real truth is, that every vicious man, whatever he may be in his intentions, is, in effect, an enemy to the society he lives in; and more

particularly a vicious good-nature is one of the cruelest characters in life. It is kind only where it ought not; it is kind to every vice and every villany; it is indulgent to every thing but honesty and innocence; and those it is sure to sacrifice wherever it comes. A good-natured villain will surfeit a sot, and gorge a glutton; nay, will glut his horses and his hounds with that food for which the venders are one day to starve to death in a dungeon; a good-natured monster will be gay in the spoils of widows and orphans. Good-nature, separated from virtue, is absolutely the worst quality and character in life; at least, if this be good-nature, to feed a dog, and to murder a man. And therefore, if you have any pretence to good-nature, pay your debts; and, in so doing, clothe those poor families that are now in rags for your finery; feed him that is starving for the bread you eat, and redeem him from misery that rots in gaol, for the dainties on which you *sared deliciously every day*. And, besides the good you will do to others by those acts of honesty, you will do infinite good to yourselves by them. Paying of debts is, next to the grace of God, the best means in the world to deliver you from a thousand temptations to sin and vanity. Pay your debts, and you will not have wherewithal to purchase a costly toy, or a pernicious pleasure.—Pay your debts, and you will not have what to lose to a villanous gamester. Pay your debts, and you will not have wherewithal to feed a number of useless horses, or infectious harlots. In one word, pay your debts, and you will of necessity *abstain from many fleshly lusts that war against the spirit, and bring you into captivity to sin*, and cannot fail to end in your utter destruction, both of soul and body.

On the other hand, if the men you deal with, and are indebted to, are rich and wily, consider they supply your extravagance with no other view but to undo you; as men pour water into a pump, to draw more from it. Consider, they could not afford to trust you, if they did not propose to make excessive gain by you; and if you think at all, think what it is to lose a fortune by folly; to purchase superfluous and pernicious vanities, for a short season, at the hazard of wanting necessities for the tedious remainder of a mis-spent life. Time, which sweetens all other

other afflictions, will perpetually sharpen and inflame this; as the gaiety and giddiness of youth go off, the wants of age will become more sharp, and more in-consolable, to the last day of your lives; and severe reflection will double every calamity that befalls you. And therefore the son of Sirach well advises, (Ecclus. xviii. 33.) *Be not made a beggar by banqueting upon borrowing; for thou shalt lie in wait for thy own life.* And again, the same wise man most excellently observes, *That he that buildeth his house with other men's money, is like one that gathereth himself stones for the tomb of his burial: he erects a sure monument, not only of his folly, but of his ruin; and the consequence is the same from extravagance of every kind; but with this difference, that the ruin derived from wine and women is the most dreadful of all others; as it involves you at once in the double distress of disease and want.* Who amongst you can at once bear the united racks of hunger, and infection, and an evil conscience? and yet this is what you must feel, although it be what you cannot bear; the torments of hell anticipated! to be deprived of every blessing, and to be immersed in misery.

Thus much for the youthful extravagant. In the next place, let me apply myself to the man of quality, that is guilty of this vice, although these are too often the same persons. If ye will not consider what ye owe your creditors, and how to pay them, I beseech you calmly to reflect and consider what ye owe to yourselves, to your family, to your country, to your king. Was it for this that ye were distinguished above others of the same rank, only to be more eminent in infamy? Was nobility bestowed upon your ancestors as a reward of virtue; and do ye use it only as a privilege for vice? Is superior worth degenerated into superior villany? If ye had any remains of modesty, ye would renounce the titles and the fortunes of your ancestors, with the virtues that attained them. Ye would blush to take place of a beggar that had virtue. Will ye yet pretend to be better men than others, when ye have renounced your humanity, when ye are no longer men, but monsters? It is not expected of you that you should perform acts of heroism and generosity; that you should reward virtue, and sup-

port merit in distress. Alas! these expectations are long since vanished, and seem only the boasts of fabulous antiquity. But methinks it might still be expected of you, that you should do common justice; that you should not be worse than the rest of mankind, because you think yourselves better; at least expect to be called so, and treated as such. Surely it might still be expected of you that you should pay your debts, and keep your promises; and, in truth, ye would not be void, either of dignity or dependents, if ye did even this. Mankind are already too much prejudiced in your favour, and would not fail to pay you sufficient regard and reverence, even if you did them no good, provided you did them no mischief. But if ye expect to be esteemed, not only without generosity, but even without justice, ye are indeed unreasonable, and will be sure to be disappointed.

In the next place, Let me apply myself to the wealthy and covetous; these are, of all others, the most inexcusable, in not paying their debts. Men that have made or improved their own fortune by industry are utterly unpardonable in oppressing the industry of others; the least that might be expected from increase of wealth is to do justice with our abundance. This was the express direction of the prophet Elisha, in the 4th chapter of 2 Kings, when he had miraculously increased the widow's oil, he commanded her first to pay her debts out of her abundance; *Go, saith he, sell the oil, and pay thy debt, and live thou and thy children of the rest.* And the reason of this is evident, the money we owe is not ours, it is the property of other men, in our keeping, and we have no more right to it than we have to the money in their pockets. And although we should make no return to God for his blessings upon our industry, in alms and acts of goodness, surely the least we can do is to do justice to men. What a dreadful reflection is it to turn the blessings of Providence into a curse to ourselves, and all we have to deal with! Men of this character are in the condition of those malignant insects who fret and make sores wherever they come, and then feed upon them: they thrive upon the miseries of mankind, which is absolutely the most detestable character upon earth! and is, next to that of a fiend, the very worst and

and vilest that can be imagined. *Woe unto him, saith the prophet Jeremiah, that buildeth his house by unrighteousness, and his chambers by wrong! (xxii. 13.) Woe unto them, saith Isaiah (ch. v. ver. 8.), that join house to house, that lay field to field, till there be no place, that they may be placed alone in the midst of the earth!* living in that character of cruelty which is best suited to a beast of prey, that scatters ruin and desolation all around him. One would think the apostle's precepts were reversed to these men; and that they thought themselves bound in conscience to owe every man every thing in the world but love and good-will. And after all, to what purpose is all this oppression, and iniquity of avarice? To heap up ill-got riches for a curse upon themselves and their posterity, and leave a memory and a carcase equally odious and offensive behind them. *They are exalted for a little while, as it is finely expressed in the 24th chapter of Job; They are exalted for a little while, but are gone, and brought low: they are taken out of the way as all other; and cut off, as the tops of the ears of corn.* They are permitted by the Divine Providence, to fill up at once the measure of their wealth and their iniquity; and, as soon as ever they are ripe for ruin, they are cut off in the fulness of their pride and fortune; and the wealth they have hoarded is like the full ear of corn, which, instead of being gathered into the barn, is trampled under foot, and scattered over the face of the earth; and so becomes a prey to rooks, and swine, and vermin.

In the last place, Let me apply myself to traders themselves, and desire them to reflect how they pay their own debts: I am afraid, some of them very badly. I have heard of a most wicked practice amongst them, of paying their journey-men and underlings in goods: I call this wicked, because, if those goods are rated at the shop-price, the journeyman is plainly defrauded, since he hath no allowance for the time and trouble he must take, and the hazard he must run in vending those goods. And, whereas he had a right to ready money for his labour, his necessities now oblige him to sell those goods at any price he can get, to the discredit of trade in general, and the real injury of that very person who laid him under a necessity of so doing, who

must of necessity suffer by having his goods sold at an under-rate: so that this practice is as ill-judged in the shopkeeper, and as weak with regard to his own interest, as it is wicked with regard to his poor underling. And indeed all bad payment to those they have to deal with, especially the poorer sort, is manifestly injurious to men in business; for the clamour of bad pay, and the discredit that necessarily attends it, generally speaking, begins there. And therefore Solomon's precepts (Prov. iii. 27, 28.) ought always to be strictly observed by them, of all mankind: *Withhold not good from them to whom it is due, when it is in the power of thine hand to do it. Say not unto thy neighbour, Go, and come again, and tomorrow I will give, when thou hast it by thee.* Although the men you deal with do not know your wants, nor consider your labour and loss of time in seeking your due, and are consequently regardless of you and your necessities, yet you well know the wants of the poor people you deal with, and the injury you do them in making them lose their time in attending upon you; and therefore you are utterly inexcusable in not relieving them from those hardships, when you can do so, barely by doing justice. How can you expect a blessing from God upon your own endeavours, when you are guilty of so much cruelty and injustice to others; when you are guilty of so much injustice to the very men by whose labour ye are supported? *A poor man, that oppresseth the poor, (saith Solomon,) is like a sweeping rain which leaveth no food, (Prov. xxviii. 3.)* Nature hath formed us to compassionate the calamities we endure; and therefore a poor man should as naturally expect aid and consolation from his brethren in the same condition, as the parched and impoverished earth expects relief from the showers of heaven; consequently, when, instead of being aided, he is oppressed by his brethren, and the little remains of his substance are torn from him, he is then in the condition of the earth, ravaged and ruined by the very means appointed by Providence to refresh and make it fruitful; and all its seed, all the means and hopes of a future harvest, swept away with its best mould. *A poor man, that oppresseth the poor, is the cruellest monster in nature; and it is the just judgment of Almighty God, that, with what measure*

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you mete, it should be measured unto you again. He that doth wrong, saith the apostle, (Col. iii. 25.) shall receive for the wrong which he hath done; as he hath done, it shall be done unto him; his reward shall return upon his own head.

And therefore, my brethren, as ye expect mercy, and protection, and blessing, from God; do justice and judgment to all you have to deal with; and be merciful after your power: for the righteous Lord loveth righteousness; and whatsoever good any man doeth, the same shall he receive of the Lord. So that a man shall say, verily, there is a reward for the righteous; verily, there is a God that judgeth the earth.

S E R M O N CXXXI.

On the great Importance and Wisdom of early Industry.

PROV. vi. ver. 6, 7, 8:

Ver. 6. Go to the ant, thou sluggard, consider her ways, and be wise.—7. Which having no guide, overseer or ruler;—8. Provideth her meat in the summer, and gathereth her food in the harvest.

IT is observable of Solomon, that as he is every-where throughout his writings zealous in the praise of industry, so he is no less severe in the reproach of idleness; and yet, at the same time that his indignation is raised against the sluggard, he seems more at a loss how to instruct and reform that unhappy race of mortals than any other whatsoever: men of every other character were capable of improvement from application and industry; but what could be expected from those who were too lazy to put any precepts into practice, however useful and wise? Had he referred them for instruction to the schools of philosophy, many precepts must be learned, and many books turned over; and they must have resolved upon a regular course of study and discipline, before they could attain those habits and that wisdom they wanted; and this he knew would be death to them, even to think of: and therefore the shortest method he could take with them, and indeed the shortest course that could possibly be taken for their amendment, was to remit them for instruction to the ant; where they needed only to look and learn; where, stretched at length by the side of a sunny bank (as proper a situation for sloth as their hearts could wish), they might see all the surprising

effects of industry, and learn all the fruits and advantages of it, at their ease, without stirring from the spot, without the expence either of toil or study, and, in short, without any other labour than that of keeping their eyes open.

Here might they behold a little creature labouring under a load of more than four times its own bulk, and conveying it with incessant industry to the common store; and if he fainted, and grew unequal to the task, he might soon have the pleasure to see a good-natured neighbour hastening to his assistance; the loaded ants going in one way, and the unloaded going out another, that they might not obstruct one another in their passage.

In the course of a few days loitering, he might observe the common stock of provision immensely increased; and, what must be a contemplation of great pleasure to such a genius, he might observe, that the labours of the year ended with the harvest; that, when they had no more to gather, they had no more to do, but to sit down and enjoy what they had got; that they had provided convenient coverings for themselves, and granaries for their food, and were under no necessity of suffering the severities of the winter-season, but were warmly lodged in the midst of peace and plenty; and never need put their feet out of doors, unless, perhaps, to sun themselves, or their provisions, after a glut of rain; which were no more than a pleasant recreation after so long confinement. And, lastly, he could not but observe, with conscious shame, that he never met with one idler in the whole community; that every individual contributed something to the public fund, and best consulted his own good, by co-operating for the good of the whole.

When the sluggard had observed all this at his ease, one would think it would not be very hard for him to turn it into an useful lesson of life, and to reason thus shortly and pertinently upon it: I also am a member of society, and should I be utterly insignificant in it? was I made to be less important than an ant? or, am I less bound to contribute to the good of the community? is not my own inseparable from it? and shall I not co-operate for the common good? every society hath a fund of wealth, best acquired by honest arts; from whence also arise the other national funds of power, credit, and esteem;

should I be insignificant to all these purposes? and can I be happy, and honourable, if I be?

Let me reflect, if I also can have resolution and industry enough to labour out my season like the ant, I shall not only contribute to the public good, but shall also, probably, be able to get myself a comfortable provision for life.—Life also hath its seasons, like the year; the times of health and strength are its summer and its autumn; if I employ these, as I ought, in some useful and honest pursuit, I shall, in all probability, have acquired wherewithal to support me in the winter of life, when the season of labour is over, and when ease and rest will be very agreeable and desirable to me: how infinitely happy shall I be, if I can live to see the day when I shall have nothing to do but to eat and drink, and take my rest!

And here we see the exceeding wisdom of Solomon's proposing the ant to the imitation of idlers, because it is an example that should excite them to industry, even for the interest of their sloth; forasmuch as it instructs us, that a short course of unwearied industry is the surest means to purchase a long vacation of ease and uninterrupted rest.

It is not barely upon this principle, but upon others of more moment, that I shall endeavour to illustrate the wisdom of early industry (the most important of all social duties) to this audience; and when the wisdom of this virtue hath sufficiently recommended it to you, I hope you will need no other motive to engage you in an earnest pursuit and practice of it.

The importance of this virtue to the public needs no proof; forasmuch as it is self-evident, that no man can be an useful member of society who doth not, some way or other, contribute either to its peace, honour, security, or interest: and how can this be done, without a proper exercise and improvement either of the powers of his body, or mind, or both, in some useful pursuit, is utterly inconceivable. And therefore I shall content myself with shewing the advantage of industry to every man in his private capacity.

And, first, Industry is wise with regard to the interests and concerns of the body: we were made for labour, and a certain portion of exercise is absolutely necessary to our health and strength; and the body can no more be preserved in vigour with-

out it, than without its natural food. What the condition of our constitution in paradise might be is not easy to say; but it is evident, that from the moment man was driven from that delightful seat, and condemned to support his life by the sweat of his brow, labour is become necessary to our well-being; and though it was pronounced upon Adam as a curse, and in punishment of his transgression, yet, whether it were to manifest the continuance of that curse upon his posterity, or rather, in the usual course of the Divine mercy, to turn curses into blessings to such as patiently submit to his chastenings, and make a right use of them; thus much is certain, that we are doomed to labour from that day to this! God and nature demand it of us; and, if we cannot be happy with it, we must be miserable without it.

As our constitutions are now mortal and corruptible, it is evident, that, in some part or other of them, we die daily; and when those perishing parts become useless to the strength and vigour of the body, they are a load and incumbrance to it; and if not thrown off by exercise, or otherwise, become matter of disease and infirmity to us: and when they grow so numerous as to corrupt the mass of blood, if we have not strength enough to throw them off in the discharges of gout and fevers, we must sink and die under them.

Now the true and natural way of getting rid of these noxious humours, is, by exerting the body in some useful labour, by which its health and strength may be preserved and improved; and, when the body is in vigour, the labours of life will rather be a pleasure than a toil to it; for the body finds as strong and natural a pleasure in employing its powers to their proper ends as the mind does in the pursuit of truth, or in the employment of any of its faculties to their proper ends. And, on the other hand, a state of idleness and inactivity is as naturally irksome to a man in full health, when the business of life calls for his strength and industry, as it is to a generous steed to be reined in when he is drawn out to the course. The perfection and happiness of every being, and every thing in this world, consists in the right application and exertion of their powers to the true ends and purposes for which they were ordained; and whenever they are diverted from those ends, or applied

plied to other purposes, they become useless and unhappy. If the body be not employed, it becomes bloated, languid, and enervate: sloth seizes it at first, and all the infirmities of life pursue sloth; and then the languid pleasures of inactivity are followed by the sharp pains of slow and racking distempers: whereas labour, as it is the sure pledge of health, so is it the sure source of all those pleasures that result from it; nay, experience teaches us, that the spirits are raised by exercise into a more constant cheerfulness and vivacity than can be supplied even by the most generous wines: nay, there is a pleasure even in the weariness that succeeds temperate exercise, which far excels all the enjoyments of sloth; and if the labours and even the languors of industry be agreeable, surely the refreshments of it must be doubly delightful. It was St. Paul's rule, that, *if any would not work, neither should they eat*. And this is not only morally just and righteous, but it is naturally so. The end of food is to supply the wastes of the body from labour; therefore if men will not labour, neither should they eat; and if they will eat, yet they had better not; for they must do it without appetite, and without pleasure; and, after all, when they have taken in their food, it will turn more into disease than digestion. This is the true state and settled rule of life; but there are exceptions to this rule: there are who live only to eat; whereas labour, as it is entitled to refreshment, so it is entitled to health and happiness from that refreshment. What an exquisite relish does it give to the plainest and coarsest food! and what softness even to a pillow of stone! *The sleep of a labouring man is sweet*, says Solomon; whereas the very rest and ease of the slothful is a burden to him: for it is certain, that as men may eat till the most delicious foods lose all their relish, so they may rest till feathers lose all their softness, till pillows and beds of down can supply them with no one easy spot whereon to recline their languid head; and, if they chance to dose in that uneasy condition, that sleep, which is a refreshment to a body wearied with labour, can be only an additional grievance to a body that is wearied with rest.

But this is not all; for as industry procures a stock of cheerful health, without which the good things of this life cannot

be enjoyed, so is it naturally fitted to procure a fund of good things for the enjoyment of life; for all these are the purchase of industry, as the want of them is the punishment of sloth. *He becometh poor*, says the wise man, *that dealeth with a slack hand; but the hand of the diligent maketh rich*.—And again; *The hand of the diligent shall bear rule, but the slothful shall be under tribute*.—*The soul of the sluggard desireth, and hath nothing; but the soul of the diligent shall be made fat*.—*The drunkard and the glutton shall come to poverty, and drowsiness shall clothe a man with rags*. And therefore, whoever desires to lay up a sufficient store of the good things of this life, for the consolation and support of his old age, let him take care to employ his youth in an honest industry; for this is the only sure means of procuring those blessings. And if he fails to do this, let him rest assured, that, in the decline of life, he will be pursued by two of the cruelest evils in life, remorse and poverty! fruitless remorse, and unpitied poverty: whereas the diligent shall not only have wherewithal to supply his own wants, but likewise to relieve the wants of others. *The slothful* (as Solomon expresses it) *coveteth greedily all the day long; but the righteous* (i. e. he that exerteth an honest industry) *giveth, and spareth not*. The man that hath raised himself by an honest industry, *giveth, and spareth not*; knowing, that, as to the wealth and affluence of this world, *there is no good in them, but for a man to rejoice and do good in his life; and that every man should eat and drink, and enjoy the good of all his labour: this is the gift of God*. And therefore, as far as pleasure is preferable to pain, and health to disease; as far as sprightliness exceeds stupidity, and sound sleep disturbed dreams; as far as freedom is preferable to servitude, and dominion to dependence; as far as plenty, and a power of doing good, surpasses pining desire and pinching poverty; so far is industry wiser and better than sloth, even with regard to the concerns of the body.

But, secondly, Industry is wise, with regard to the interest of the soul. Virtue and knowledge are to the soul, what health and strength are to the body; the same industry is equally perfective and useful, and the same indolence equally ruinous and destructive to both: the same sloth that brings diseases upon the body,

brings vices and evil affections upon the soul. *I went by the field of the slothful*, says Solomon, *and by the vineyard of the man void of understanding: and lo! it was all grown over with thorns, and nettles had covered the face thereof; and the stone wall thereof was broken down.* The field and vineyard of the slothful are exact emblems of his mind: instead of grapes and olives, instead of the noblest fruits of culture and study, it is over-run with thorns and nettles, and evil weeds of every kind; with noxious vices, with perverse appetites, and vexatious humours, that tear, and sting, and are equally vexatious to himself, and all around him, without any more distinction than the briars and nettles of his vineyard make between their owner and any one else that walks through them: nay, not only so, but its *wall is broken down*, its fence of virtue and knowledge is in ruins; nor has it any thing to defend it from the intrusion and devastation of vice; it is now an open prey to every invader.

Plato tells us, that industry is as much preferable to idleness as brightness is to rust; plainly implying, that idleness is to the mind what rust is to metals; and in truth it is so; it does not only tarnish its lustre, and make it unfit for use, but it also eats into it. The mind was formed for exercise, as well as the body; and, if it be unemployed, it will not only grow rusty and dull, but it will also prey upon itself. And though it should not degenerate altogether into the condition of the sluggard's vineyard, though it should not fall into all the ruin and devastation of vice, yet will it never want thorns and nettles, it will never want sufficient supplies of spleen, and evil appetites, to punish the neglect of honest pursuits and useful attainments. *The desire of the slothful killeth him*, saith Solomon; *for his hands refuse to labour.* And sure it must be a state of miserable torment, passionately to desire what we see we shall not enjoy, and cannot be at the pains to procure: and it is obvious to observe in the world numbers of men repining to death, every day, at the advancement of others to honour and eminence from the improvement of those abilities which were naturally, perhaps, inferior to their own: and yet all this is but the just and natural reward of honest industry, in proof of that excellent observation of the wise man,

(Prov. xxii. 29.) *Seest thou a man diligent in his business? he shall stand before kings; he shall not stand before mean men.*

Again, Industry is yet farther wise with regard to the concerns of the soul, because a proper improvement in knowledge is necessary to all conditions in life. Every man does not need to be a merchant or a mechanic, but every man should be a man of knowledge, and, if possible, a man of learning, at least, in his own profession. For this reason the ancients, though they had but one Ceres, and one Vulcan, one deity that presided over the labours of the hammer and the plough; yet had they nine Muses, because their aid was useful to men of every character and condition in life. Learning is an accession of new light and new knowledge; and new light and new knowledge will always be useful to inform and guide us to more advantage in every pursuit; and there is scarcely any art so mean and mechanic to which learning might not be both ornamental and useful: there is scarcely one profession in the world where a right application of knowledge would not carry us to uncommon degrees of eminence. And if learning be thus honourable in every other profession, surely where it is itself the principal, if not the sole profession, the want of it must be infinitely reproachful! and yet there is no medium; men must either want it, or take pains to attain it: and hence it is that Minerva, the goddess of wisdom, among the ancients, had the epithet of *Εργατις*, or the worker, given her, to shew that none but the industrious were entitled to her assistance.

Now, as wealth is to be acquired in youth, for the support of age, so is knowledge also, with more reason:

1st, Because it is an higher and nobler attainment. And, 2dly, because age, which for the most part adds to our wealth, from the accession of avarice, and the retrenchment of the expensive passions, takes away from our knowledge, by impairing the powers of the mind; and that, when we want it most, both for our own credit, and the instruction of others, therefore we should take care to be plentifully provided. *Wise men*, saith Solomon, *lay up knowledge*:—well knowing it is the noblest and most valuable treasure they can possibly lay up; and if, as the same wise man observes,

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the grey head is the beauty of old men, it is beyond all doubt, that wisdom is the glory of the grey head. O! how comely a thing is judgment for grey hairs! (says the wise son of Sirach) and for ancient men to know counsel! O! how comely is the wisdom of old men, and understanding and counsel to men of honour! (Ecclus. xxv. 4, 5.) And therefore, as knowledge is better than ignorance, and virtue than vice; as far as culture exceeds wildness and barbarity, and brightness excels rust; as light is more lovely than darkness, and counsel more becoming the grey head than uninformed dotage; so far is diligence wiser, and better, and more valuable, than idleness, with regard even to the temporal interests of the soul.

In the last place: If diligence be wise with regard to the temporal concerns of the soul, it must surely be much more so with regard to its eternal interest. There are many pursuits that are proper and ornamental in life; there are many of high concern; but there is one only of infinite importance: there are many of excellent use; but there is one only of absolute necessity: and happy, beyond all comparison, wise and happy, are they who have early *chosen that better part.*—*The fear of the Lord, says Solomon, is the beginning of wisdom.* And it is observable, that the Hebrew word here interpreted *the beginning*, signifies either the foundation or the top of any thing; and, in the present application of it, it is strictly true in either sense: the fear of the Lord is the foundation and the top of all wisdom. That early and prudent caution, which is the parent and the companion of true wisdom, best enters into the mind, and dwells there, from an awe of religion, from the sense of an infinitely wise and powerful Being always present to every motion in our mind, and every action of our lives; and there is not a thought in our heart that is hid from him; and as this is the best principle of that caution and consideration which should conduct our lives, so is the end it aims at, at once the wisest and the noblest pursuit of reasonable beings; if it be wise to lay up early *treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and thieves break through and steal;* is it not infinitely more so, to lay up for yourselves *treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust can corrupt, and*

where thieves cannot break through and steal? If it be wise to lay up early treasures of knowledge, for the conduct of life, for the improvement of our professions and faculties, and for the honour and ornament of our advanced years, to support us with dignity in the decline of life; is it not infinitely more so, diligently to search after that knowledge that will adorn our Christian profession, and treasure up those precepts that will conduct us to everlasting glory, and give us honour in the sight of angels? Thou sluggard, if it be wise in thee to learn of the ant to make provision for the winter of life, for one short and uncertain season, is it not infinitely more so to lay up for all eternity—for a life of endless duration, and inconceivable happiness?

SERMON CXXXII.

By GEORGE HORNE, D.D.

Dean of Canterbury, and President of St. Mary Magdalen College, Oxford.

The Character of true Wisdom, and the Means of attaining it.

PROV. iv. 7.

Wisdom is the principal thing, therefore get wisdom: and with all thy getting, get understanding.

THE sage instructor of the world, from the eminence on which Providence had placed him, surveys mankind. Discontented with themselves, and their present condition, he beholds them engaged in the pursuit of something that still flies before them. Pleasure, wealth, and power, appear in their view, and solicit their attention. Grieved to see time mispent in quest of things perishable, and labour lost on that which either may not be obtained, or, when obtained, may disappoint in enjoyment all the hopes excited by expectation, he raises his voice, and wishes it to be heard to the ends of the earth. He calls men off from a fruitless chace after objects attained with difficulty, and possessed without satisfaction; he points out one adequate to all their efforts; one, in the pursuit of which no time can be mispent, no labour

labour can be lost; one, which presents itself a fair mark, to be always hit by the quick eye and the steady hand; one, that may be surely gained by genius and diligence, and when gained, is productive of pleasure, riches, and honour; pleasure which fadeth not away, riches which none can take from the happy possessor, and the honour which cometh from God only. Solomon found, if men were disposed to be contented with any thing, it was that with which they never should be contented—their ignorance. He exhorts them to learn: *Wisdom is the principal thing, therefore get wisdom: and with all thy getting, get understanding.*

The subject will best be laid before you, in its several branches, by considering, what it is we are enjoined to acquire; how we are to acquire it; and why we are to acquire it.

First, then, we will consider the nature of that which we are so earnestly enjoined to acquire.

All the divine learning upon earth is contained in the books of the Old and New Testament, which are written in Hebrew and Greek: those languages therefore, with the Latin, must be studied; and the study of them falls within the department of human learning.

Enough of divine learning, perhaps it will be urged, may be gathered from translations for all the purposes required. But to whom are we indebted for translations, unless to those who by good and sufficient learning became qualified for the work? And as they, however worthy and able, were yet very far from infallible, it will frequently happen, in points of difficulty, that we can neither sufficiently establish our own faith, nor confute the arguments of the adversary, without recurring to the originals. The adversary, to serve his turn, will recur to them; and what will become of us, if we are not able to follow him?

The history of the people of God cannot be understood, without taking with us that of pagan states, particularly of the Assyrian, Persian, Grecian, and Roman empires. An exact acquaintance with what has been passing in the world, since the extinction of the last, cannot be dispensed with in a commentator on the prophecies, particularly those in the

Revelation. To adjust the situation of places, and the succession of times, we must call to our assistance the sciences of geography, chronology, and astronomy. Nor can the proportions of the temple and its furniture, described in the books of Kings and Chronicles, and afterward referred to by Ezekiel and St. John, be well comprehended and ascertained, without something of mathematics and mechanics. Thus necessary is a knowledge of languages and sciences, to interpret the letter of scripture, the source of doctrines and precepts, the foundation of all improvements moral and spiritual; and they must ever be the best interpreters, who have the largest share of it. The advantage of a superior skill in the Greek language, as exercised on passages in the New Testament, and the early ecclesiastical writers, has been eminently displayed in a controversy now subsisting, the subject of which is of the highest importance.

Less, indeed, of human learning was needed by the clergy, when the world around them had none; as was the case in the dark ages preceding the reformation. To the clergy, however, of those very ages are unbelievers indebted for the preservation of that learning, which, since the reformation, they have employed in vain against Christianity. From the clergy in modern times have proceeded nine in ten of the books written to facilitate the progress of literature, and disseminate every species of it through the world. Enemies to false philosophy, they have ever proved themselves the friends and promoters of that which is true. Yet a certain author having very innocently mentioned "a philosophical divine," as a character that might be supposed to exist, without any contradiction implied, the historian of the Roman empire is pleased to represent such a supposed being as a strange centaur, a composition absurd and monstrous, half man and half brute. According to his own ideas, however, the representation may be just enough; for a philosopher, as we have too much reason to apprehend, in his acceptance of the word, is an unbeliever; a divine is (and, let us hope, will always continue to be) a believer. Wisdom, it seems, was born with the infidel, and will die with him. We will take the liberty,

liberty, notwithstanding, to say—because it is true—that whatever learning may at any time have been brought to the attack, there has never hitherto been found a deficiency of it for the defence of religion; neither will there be found any such deficiency, we trust, in time to come, while our schools and universities (chiefly under the management and direction of clergymen) shall continue to exist and flourish. From considering the nature of that wisdom we are in the text exhorted to acquire, this leads us to bestow some reflections,

Secondly, on the best method of acquiring it.

Learning is that which may be learned. As wisdom is not communicated by inspiration, so neither is it born with us. We come into the world without principles of any kind, because without ideas of any kind. This opinion was long controverted, as being thought to militate against religion. But the apprehension appears to have been groundless. The doctrine is established, and religion has received no detriment.

It is still, nevertheless, imagined, that a man may make wonderful discoveries by the exercise of his own powers; but the first step in the process has been sometimes unaccountably overlooked. It has been forgotten, that those powers must be elicited and formed by cultivation; that every man must be taught by some one how to use them, or that he will discover nothing. A truth, when it has been proposed and explained to us, appears clear and evident; all the truths contained in the propositions of Euclid appear so: but, surely, it follows not, that, without information, we should have discovered them, or have once thought concerning them. This is a fallacy by which mankind of late have been greatly misled. No instance can be produced, from Adam to the present hour, of a single human being, brought up apart from all instructors, who ever spoke or reasoned. The state, indeed, is unnatural, and one into which man cannot fall but by accident. In the common course of things, Providence has been pleased to ordain that he should be born in society, and have those about him who never fail to teach him as much as they themselves know; their language,

and the notions current among them. These he learns; and if he be taught no more, he knows no more.

Our countrymen sent in quest of a new continent, to visit the extremities of the old ones, and the distant isles of the South Sea, have returned with accounts which confirm what has been said, and may serve to convince us, that *man is born*, as the scripture expresses it, *like a wild ass's colt* (Job, xi. 12.); and, without education, will continue such: that he is born with capabilities only, and is in reality what he is made by instruction. These accounts should produce in us a sentiment of pity for our fellow creatures, whose condition is so truly deplorable, and one at the same time of gratitude to our heavenly Father, who has cast our lot in a fairer ground. Some modern philosophers seem to think the rocks of Patagonia and the deserts of New Zealand to be the only schools in which human nature can be studied to advantage. But, surely, we might as well expect a statuary to accomplish himself in his art, by looking all day at a block of marble, because out of that block a statue may be formed. Shall we judge of a plant, by contemplating the seed from which it is to spring? No; let us view the tree, its root fixed in the earth, and drawing moisture from beneath; its trunk fully grown, its branches expanded, and drinking in the dew of heaven from above; the whole invested with its foliage as a beautiful garment, and crowned with its fruit in the season. Let us not frame our ideas of human nature by surveying an infant or a savage. Shew us the man completely formed and perfected by a liberal, a learned, and a religious education.

From the mountains of Switzerland a voice has been heard, proclaiming, that we are all mistaken; that to teach (in matters of religion and morality) is to prejudice; and therefore, infuse, says this philosopher, no principles into the minds of youth; let them adopt their own when they come to years of discretion.

But still it is an indisputable fact, that men must learn; and they who do not learn betimes, will learn with far more difficulty, when advanced in years. The soil stiffens and hardens by continuing untilld

untilled. The ground must be broken up, and good seed must be sown, by him who expects to see vallies covered over with corn at the time of harvest. Weeds and thistles only will be the spontaneous and unhappy produce. If children are not early conducted into the paths of truth and virtue, they will be found, at a maturer age, in those of error and vice. We cannot, I am afraid, prevail upon the world, the flesh, and the devil, to stand neuter during the experiment; an experiment which whoever shall make once, without pretending to the spirit of prophecy, we may venture to predict, will find no encouragement to make it again. The truth is, we must teach children the best we can while they are young, leaving them to alter and correct afterwards if they shall see occasion. The nature of the thing admits of no other method consistent with the dictates of reason and common sense.

Instruction being thus necessary, we are to consider through what hands it may be most advantageously conveyed. Through those, perhaps it will be said, of the parents. One should certainly imagine so at first sight; but then all parents are not able to instruct, having not been themselves sufficiently instructed. Those of them who are able, may not be willing to submit to the task; while many, both able and willing, cannot find leisure from their necessary business to undertake it. The fault of Mr. Locke's treatise is, that it supposes none of these cases to happen, but that a father shall always be at liberty to take care of his son's education. The same fault is chargeable on the plan of a very sensible and agreeable instructress of a neighbouring kingdom: with great force of genius and goodness of heart, she describes two persons of noble birth as giving up the world, and retiring for a course of years from public life, that they might devote their time and fortune to the education of their children. Undoubtedly the design is praise-worthy; they were excellently well employed: would to God, that many of their rank were so employed, in every kingdom upon earth! But all cannot do it; the scheme can never become general.

There is, besides, another difficulty in the way. The partiality and fondness of

the tutor, when that tutor is a father, may often do the pupil an injury, the effects of which will go with him through life. To prevent this, the Spartans, by a law of the state, took children at a certain age out of the hands of their parents, and placed them under other masters. The Hebrews had their schools of the prophets; the Greeks and Romans their academies and gymnasia; and since the revival of learning in these latter days, the western world has abounded with schools and universities; of which, without incurring the charge of self-adulation, we may truly say, none have exceeded those in our own country.

In a public education, the means and instruments necessary for the acquisition of learning are possessed in a more full and complete manner. The master can give his time and his thoughts wholly to the work: constant and long experience confers a degree of skill not otherwise to be attained. A spirit of emulation is excited in the scholar, who goes on with more sprightliness and alacrity in the company of his school-fellows, forgetting those that are behind, and pressing forward to those who are before, with the determination of a Cæsar, that nothing is yet done, while any thing remains to be done. A regular succession of business, at stated times, inures him to live by rule, and forbids him to be idle; while the discipline by which it is enforced, renders him healthy and hardy in mind and body. By being put so soon to manage and bustle for himself, he is prepared for the world into which he must enter, and in which he must pass his days; the various tempers and dispositions of his numerous companions bring him acquainted with those of mankind, among whom he is to pass them; and he forms connections, which, by banishing selfishness, by exchanging offices of friendship, by mutual assistance and communication of studies, as well as in many other ways, contribute towards his passing them with pleasure and emolument. If all who are engaged in the superintendence of our public seminaries could only bestow equal attention on the learning and morals of those under their care, so that they might go forth (and such, you will all bear me witness, have lately gone forth from hence) good men

as well as good scholars, the dispute between the patrons of public and private education would be, perhaps, in great measure, at an end.

Respecting the method of school instruction at present in use among us, it is one which has been long tried, and found successful; witness those great and shining characters, formed under its auspices, which adorn our annals; nor have its adversaries yet been able to propose another, liable, upon the whole, to fewer objections.

The observations made by an excellent writer on the plan proposed by the great Milton, are too valuable not to be recited to you upon the present occasion:

"The purpose of Milton, as it seems, was to teach something more solid than the common literature of schools, by reading those authors that treat of physical subjects, such as the Georgic and astronomical treatises of the ancients. But the truth is, that the knowledge of external nature, and of the sciences which that knowledge requires or includes, is not the great or the frequent business of the human mind. Whether we provide for action or conversation, whether we wish to be useful or pleasing, the first requisite is the religious and moral knowledge of right and wrong; the next is an acquaintance with the history of mankind, and with those examples which may be said to embody truth, and prove, by events, the reasonableness of opinions. Prudence and justice are virtues of all times, and of all places; we are perpetually moralists, but we are geometricians only by chance.—Our intercourse with intellectual nature is necessary; our speculations upon matter are voluntary and at leisure. Physical knowledge is of such rare emergence, that one man may know another half his life, without being able to estimate his skill in hydrostatics or astronomy; but his moral and prudential character immediately appears. Those authors therefore are to be read at schools that supply most axioms of prudence, most principles of moral truth, and most materials for conversation: and these purposes are best answered by poets, orators, and historians."

Some have thought, that as we are now furnished with translations of the ancient classical authors, we may spare ourselves the trouble of learning their languages. Were the question only concerning matters of fact, it might be deemed perhaps of little importance to consider by what means we come at the knowledge of them, so that we do but obtain the truth; though, by the way, whether in particular instances we have obtained it, can often only be known (as was observed before in the case of the scriptures) by consulting the originals. But there is much more in the matter: the writers of Greece and Rome are our masters in style and composition; with relation to which, the spirit of every piece will evaporate in the transfusion. Next in value to knowledge, is the mode of communicating it with ease and propriety. They who have studied the best writers of antiquity with this view, will always themselves be the best writers in any other language. When these shall cease to be regarded as our models, elegant simplicity and manly energy will give place to a false glare of affectation and refinement; loose and licentious tenets will be tricked out in the meretricious garb of false eloquence. A vitiated taste in writing, like that which preceded the decline and downfall of the Roman empire, will precede our own. Tacitus and Seneca will be imitated, rather than Cæsar and Cicero: epithet, point, and antithesis, will prevail; and we shall prepare for slavery, by "babbling a dialect of France."

Nothing could tend more to accelerate a catastrophe of this kind, than the adoption of that system of foppery and immorality recommended by a late noble author, enamoured almost to distraction of the language and manners of our neighbours upon the continent. Learning and religion would then no longer make a part in the education of our youth. One would be banished under the notion of pedantry, the other excluded by the name of superstition. Travel and a knowledge of the world, it seems, may supply the place of both. To know the world, is doubtless expedient; in some circumstances, necessary. But a man should know many other things before he enters upon that study, or he will do well

not

not to enter upon it at all. Let him lay in a stock, and that no moderate one, of useful learning and sound principles, ere he set out upon his travels, or he will be little the better for having seen the world, though the world may be somewhat the merrier for having seen him. If he go out an ignoramus, he will come home a profligate, with the atheist ingrafted upon the blockhead. As to the business of the graces—before the gloss can be given, a substance must be prepared to receive it; and solid bodies take the brightest polish.

From what has been said, you will perhaps be induced to think, that in times like these, and in a matter of such importance, projects of innovation are dangerous things. We know what we are to lose; let us be well informed what we are to gain, lest we should be led to exchange an old system with some defects, for a new one with many more: defects which are of little consequence, for defects which are of very great consequence indeed to the general state of learning, and the constitution of our country.—Reformation was the word in the last century, and one was at length effected, which swept away schools and universities, with the government civil and ecclesiastical. The revenues allotted to the support of cathedrals and these their appendages, were seized, with a view to augment the smaller livings. But mark the event—When the estates were sold, the presbyterian ministers who had taken possession of the livings, and expected the augmentation, were told, to their utter astonishment, that the money was wanted to support public credit. It was wanted, and it was applied accordingly; all was then overwhelmed by a deluge of enthusiasm, and illiterate fanaticism. The deluge which now threatens us is one of another kind, but not a whit less formidable.

Thus much for the wisdom we are exhorted to acquire, and the method of acquiring it. A few words shall be said, and they shall be but few, in the

Third and last place, upon the advantages attending such acquisition, to the individual himself, and to the community.

To the individual, wisdom is indeed, as Solomon properly styles it, *the principal*

thing. The seat of its residence is in the noblest part of the human composition; and that noble part it renders still more noble. What else gives to man the superiority over brutes; to angels over man; and to the Omniscient over all his creatures? *The Lord is a God of knowledge* (1 Sam. ii. 3.); and wisdom was with him from eternity. (Prov. viii. 22. Wisdom, ix. 9.)

The pleasures of wisdom exceed all others, in kind, degree, and duration, far as heaven is higher than earth. *Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace.* (Prov. iii. 17.) A studious disposition makes those who are blessed with it valuable, good, and happy. It enables them to find a paradise in solitude, and profitably as well as agreeably to fill up the intervals of business. It renders them little sensible to the allurements of external objects, to those trifles and improprieties which disgrace the man, and degrade the Christian. The ill-instructed and unemployed are the persons whose imagination is always wandering and afloat.—For want of solid nourishment, their curiosity and their appetites turn to objects either vain or dangerous; and hence proceed all those inventions for squandering away thought and time, which generally end in a forgetfulness of God and ourselves. It is incredible what inconveniences are avoided by those who can pass their vacant hours with books and their own thoughts. “Happy,”—says a prelate, in his day the admiration and delight of mankind, I mean the accomplished archbishop of Cambray,—“happy they, who are disgusted with “violent pleasures, and know how to be “pleased with the sweets of an innocent “life. Happy they who delight in instruction, and find a satisfaction in “cultivating their minds with knowledge. Into whatever situation adverse “fortune may throw them, they always “carry entertainment with them; and “the disquiet, which preys on others in “the midst of pleasures, is unknown to “those who can employ themselves in “reading. Happy they, who love to “read!” Let it be added, that this happiness is one which as the world does not give, so neither can the world take away. It will never leave us, but continue

tinue a fast and firm friend, when every other pleasure shall have forsaken us. Wisdom will comfort us in the day of sorrow, and support us in the hour of death. Like the holy ark accompanying the camp of Israel, she will go with us over Jordan, and conduct us to our inheritance in the land of promise. *Exalt her*, says the Wise Man, in the words immediately following my text, *exalt her, and she shall promote thee; she shall bring thee to honour when thou dost embrace her; she shall give to thine head an ornament of grace; a crown of glory shall she deliver to thee.*

To a community the advantages of wisdom are many and great. A nation glories not less in the learning than in the valour of her sons. Long and illustrious is the train of literary heroes, which Britain beholds with an honest and conscious pride, who from age to age have filled the most exalted stations in church and state, or presided in the different departments of science, or from the shades of an honourable and lettered retirement, sent forth their writings for the entertainment and instruction of mankind.

My younger brethren, the hope of the rising generation, our future joy and crown, all these were men like yourselves, trained in the same course of education. Think of their examples, and emulate their fame. The trophies of Miltiades, you know, would not suffer Themistocles to sleep. Hear the author of the book of Ecclesiasticus upon this subject, in a chapter read constantly at our universities, on the days appointed for a solemn commemoration of founders and benefactors: *Let us now praise famous men, and our fathers that begat us. The Lord hath wrought great glory by them, through his great power, from the beginning. Such as did bear rule in their kingdoms, men renowned for their power, giving counsel by their understanding, and declaring prophecies: leaders of the people by their counsels, and by their knowledge of learning meet for the people; wise and eloquent in their instructions. All these were honoured in their*

generations, and were the glory of their times. Their bodies are buried in peace, but their name liveth for evermore. While the world shall last, and any regard be paid to that which deserves regard, the people will tell of their wisdom, and the congregation will shew forth their praise. (Ecclus. xlv.)

If therefore there be any virtue, if there be any praise, think on these things, meditate on them, give yourselves wholly to them. Time is on the wing. It flies, to return no more. Seize the moments as they pass, and employ them to the best advantage. Lose not the golden opportunity, the sweet hour of prime, the morning of youth, health, and strength. Conquer the difficulties at first setting out, and all will be pleasure ever after. Labour now, and comfortable will be your rest, when the season of labour shall be over. *For glorious is the fruit of labour, and the root of wisdom shall never fall away.* (Wisdom, iii. 15.) Let the sanctity of your manners keep pace with the improvement of your minds. To your governors be respectful and obedient; to your companions gentle and loving; to all, courteous and obliging. And that the divine blessing may be upon you in what you do, remember to begin and end your studies with prayer. *If any man lack wisdom, let him ask of God.* (James, i. 5.) Let him ask that, as the son of David did, and all things else, judged proper for him, shall be added to it. (1 Kings, iii. 11.) Pray therefore that God would give you wisdom that *sitteth by his throne, and reject you not from among his children: that he would send her out of his holy heavens, and from the throne of his glory, that being present, she may labour with you, that you may know what is pleasing unto him. For she knoweth and understandeth all things, and she shall lead you soberly in your doings, and preserve you by her power. So shall your works be acceptable* (Wisdom, ix. 4, 10, &c.) in the sight of heaven and earth, bringing glory to God, credit to your instructors, comfort to your friends, honour to yourselves, and benefit to your country.

SERMON CXXXIII.

By PATRICK DELANY, D.D.

Dean of Down.

The great Folly, Iniquity, Absurdity,
and crying Guilt of Duelling.

EXOD. XX. 13.

Thou shalt not kill.

THIS precept being laid down here in general unlimited terms, which, taken in their full extent, equally prohibit taking away the lives of men and of other animals, upon any account whatsoever; the true sense of it must be learnt from comparing this with other parts of the scriptures.

That it was not intended to preclude men from the right of taking away the lives of others, in any circumstance whatsoever, is evident from the 2d verse of the 22d chapter of this book of Exodus; where the thief found *breaking up* in the night, that is, breaking into your house, or making use of any force to rob you, is permitted to be slain. And from many other parts of the scriptures it appears, that persons guilty of certain crimes are expressly commanded to be put to death; such as the witch, the blasphemer, the murderer, the disobedient son, &c.

That the command was not intended as an absolute prohibition to take away the lives of the inferior creatures, is evident from the grant given to Noah, and, in him, to all his posterity, in the 9th chapter of Genesis; where creatures are given for food in as ample a manner as the herbs of the field were given before; only with this restraint, that the blood was not to be eaten with the flesh.

Forasmuch then as neither criminals nor inferior creatures are prohibited to be slain by this precept, it follows, that nothing is prohibited by it, but murder; that is, the taking away the life of any man unjustly. In this case, and in this only, we are to understand that denunciation of Divine justice to be due. *And surely your blood of your lives will I require; at the hand of every beast will I require it; and at the hand of man: at the hand of every man's brother will I require the life of man. Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed; for in the image of God made he man.*

When God gave man a right to the creatures for food, prohibiting them to eat the blood with the flesh, in that pro-

hibition he virtually commands them to shed the blood of those creatures, before they made the flesh their food; and as he knew this power and practice of shedding of blood would by degrees harden the mind, and be an inlet to cruelty, even to their own species; he guards in the most effectual manner imaginable against that evil, by a dreadful denunciation of vengeance against all those that should dare to shed the blood of man. *And surely your blood of your lives will I require; at the hand of every beast will I require it; and at the hand of man: at the hand of every man's brother will I require the life of man. Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed; for in the image of God, made he man.* The meaning of all which is, (and so the best interpreters understand it,) that God will arm every living creature, both brute and human, to the destruction of the murderer; as I believe there is scarcely a creature so contemptible, either in earth or air, whom he hath not at one time or other made the instrument of his vengeance on that crying guilt. And, as if all this security were insufficient, he fences in this lord of the nether world, yet farther, with the veneration of his Maker's image stamped upon him. *Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed; for in the image of God made he man.*

How nobly is this declaration fitted to convey this great document, and impress it deep on the whole race of Adam! that God, the great guardian and governor of the world, watched over the lives of men with so peculiar a providence, that if any man should dare to shed the human blood, sure vengeance should pursue him: that the Divine justice would arm the powers of every living creature to his destruction: nay, would arm his own brother's right hand to his ruin.

And how nobly is the justice and the solemnity of this declaration asserted in the reason annexed: *For in the image of God made he man.* What lower or less extended vengeance was due to that devoted miscreant, to that sacrilegious arm, that should violate the majesty of the Creator's image, where his goodness, his wisdom, and his power had impressed it; than to have the whole creation set in array against him?

Murder is in itself a crime so destructive to society, and so dreadful to nature, that nothing.

nothing need to be said to aggravate the horror of it to the human mind. But forasmuch as the corruptions of mankind have at length found out a way of perpetrating this crying guilt, in this part of the world, not only always with impunity, but often with applause, have even made it honourable under the fashionable appellation of duelling. My business at present shall be to examine it in this view; and to shew you by God's assistance, that no disguise of name, or power of custom, can make this practice less detestable in the eye of reason, or less criminal in the eye of God.

And in order to do this, I shall inquire, first into the origin of this practice of duelling.

And secondly, into the causes and occasions of it. And, under this head, shall endeavour to shew you, how wicked, how absurd, how pernicious it is, in all its pretences; and how dreadful in its final issue.

And first as to its original it is agreed by the best writers on this subject, that the practice was in the beginning undoubtedly derived from a principle of humanity; and a tenderness for the lives of mankind. And the best accounts I have been able to collect concerning it are as follow:

When nations happened to fall into contentions, which could not be accommodated by treaty, nor determined by hostility, without infinite slaughter and devastation; to spare the effusion of so much blood, it was sometimes agreed amongst them, to leave the decision of the controversy to the hazard of a few lives. And to agree, that the consequence of such a conquest should be the same as if those nations had contended with all their numbers. Such was that of Paris and Menalaus, in Homer; and Xanthus and Melanthius, kings of Athens and Bœotia. Such also was that of the Horatii and Curiatii in the Roman history; and of Edmund Ironside and Canutus the Dane, in the history of England. Nor is this practice wholly out of use, in the heathen world, at this day. Such was that between the king of Pegu, and his uncle, about the kingdom of Auva; mentioned by Mandello in his travels (p. 96).

And this kind of duelling was, without question, humane and just; foras-

much as it violated no law of God or man; and was in prevention of much greater evil.

The next kind of duelling that we meet with in history was, when two hostile armies being contiguous to one another, either avowedly or tacitly agreed, that a chosen champion of either side should combat for the honour of his country. Such was the duel of David and Goliath, (1st book of Samuel.) Such also was that of Manlius Torquatus, and, after that, of Valerius Corvinus, with two Gauls, who challenged the valiantest of the Romans to single combat. And many later instances of the same kind; and these without question were lawful; because permitted by their commanders, and performed, for the most part, by persons whose lives were devoted to the service of the public, in arms. So that whether they fell in single combat, or in a more general engagement, their lives were equally expended in the service of their country.

Another kind of duelling, formerly practised in the western part of the world, was either upon accusation of life, or trial of right; and the occasions of them were as follow:

When any person accused another of treason, or any other capital crime, the person accused, if he insisted upon his innocence, had a right to retort the lie upon his accuser, and challenge him to make good his charge by combat. Now this practice, although perhaps not strictly justifiable, yet, however, much may be said in defence of it: because it was a terror to false and malicious accusations; and was, in the person accused, an appeal to Almighty God, for the innocence of his heart. Besides, that public justice seems to be concerned, is not easily admitting that a good subject's life should be taken away, upon a single testimony; which might be grounded either upon mistake, or malice, or corruption. And, on the other hand, as single testimonies should not easily be slighted, those certainly must have most weight which the authors were ready to vouch, at the hazard of their lives. And therefore it is not much to be wondered at, if in ages more martial and less refined, in the reasons and rules of justice, combats of this kind were allowed of by public authority. And of these many instances are to be

met with in the histories of France and England.

As to the other point; viz. duels upon trial of right or inheritance, these also were very antient. Such was the duel of Corbis and Orfua, two Spanish noblemen, about the principality of the city Ibes, mentioned by Livy, in the twenty-eighth book of his history. And instances of the same kind are to be met with in our own histories.

Now these were occasioned by such disputes about rights, as were not easily decided by law; and therefore the parties chose to bring the controversy to a shorter issue, by combat: and the law allowed them to do so. And these duels proceeded upon the same principles with those upon accusation of life last-mentioned; and from a persuasion, that God would determine the issue of the combat, according to the rights of the cause.

It was for these reasons, and upon these principles, that duelling obtained and was allowed in the world, from the earliest ages, until the time of the emperor Charles the Vth; who having charged Francis the French king with breach of faith, Francis retorted the lie upon him, and provoked him to single combat; which, however, that wise and valiant emperor thought fit to decline.

From this accident, the high spirit of the Gallic nation (who are not justly chargeable with want of sufficient bravery), in compliment to their prince, and the better to demonstrate that injurious and high provocation he had given the emperor, established the giving of the lie as the highest indignity that could be offered to human nature; and such as every man of honour ought to resent to death; imagining, it would reflect no small glory upon their nation, that the meanest gentleman in France would not put up with an indignity, which the great Charles the Vth endured with patience.

And as that nation have been sufficiently successful in giving rise to many other fashions of less consequence, so likewise hath their example derived this wicked and pernicious practice all over Europe: and, in so doing, been the occasion of more bloodshed in the compass of a few years, than all the duels known in the world from the foundation of it, till that time. Except perhaps such duels as were more antiently authorized in their

own country, upon trials of right; till those practices were restrained by St. Lewis and St. Philip the fair. And it is a justice due to the memory of their last great monarch, Lewis the XIVth, to own, that he did, with great wisdom, and a most religious fortitude, repress this practice throughout his own dominions: and, if other princes have not followed his example, it must however be owned that it was not his fault, if this evil hath not found an effectual remedy where it had its rise.

As to the duels antiently in use, they were, as I before observed, founded, for the most part, upon humanity and justice; upon the honour of nations; and upon trials of right, and vindication of innocence; and that too by public authority. And were, in some sort, appeals to Almighty God. Whereas those of the last and the present age, if not in direct opposition to all these great ends, are at least utterly destitute of every one of them, founded upon fantastic and absurd points of honour! points of honour as they are called; but, in truth, points of infamy! nor is it possible it should be otherwise, when they are acted in direct contradiction to the public good, to public authority, to religion, and virtue of every kind; as will appear by examining this matter a little more exactly.

And, in order to do this, give me leave to lay down the following positions, as undoubted truths:

First, That honour, with regard to others, is nothing but the fame of virtue; that is, it is that reputation which arises from the opinion which mankind conceive of our virtue, attended with esteem and regard; the natural consequence, and in some sort, the natural reward of virtue and worth of every kind. First, I say, true honour, with regard to others, is fame arising from the reputation of virtue; and secondly, with regard to ourselves, true honour is the utmost refinement and perfection of virtue, in the discharge of every duty in life. And this will appear evidently from asking ourselves these two plain questions: First, Why we honour any man? and secondly, Who they are whom we honour? Do we honour any man for cowardice, or theft, or villany of any kind? no; we honour men for courage, for honesty, for integrity. We honour nothing but virtue and

and worth : we can honour nothing else : and what is strictly and properly called true honour, in any man, is nothing but refinement in virtue.

For example ; a man of honour will not fail to pay a just debt, although the law could not oblige him to it. A man of honour will keep his word, although no man alive could prove the violation of it upon him ; nor exact the performance of it. A man of honour will return the pledge committed to his trust, although the owner were dead, and no mortal conscious to it.

And the reason is obvious ; a man of honour hath more regard to truth and justice, than he hath either to self-interest or the terrors of the law : truth and justice are the rules and measures of his conduct ; and therefore a man of honour will tell the truth, although he be sure to suffer by it ; and although he might disguise it without any possible damage or reproach, other than from his own conscience.

Such is a man of honour in his private capacity.

In a public character, a man of honour will pique himself upon discharge of duty to the public, on every just occasion, what danger or distress soever attend that discharge ; and although neither danger nor infamy attended the neglect of it. For instance, in the army, a man of honour will not fail to discharge every part of duty incumbent upon him : neither will he let the meanest soldier exceed him in the lowest point of discipline ; although possibly he might do so without infamy or punishment.

A man of honour will maintain the post assigned him, although ten thousand dangers and difficulties attended it. Neither will he hesitate to go upon the most difficult attempt, which his duty points out to him, although infinite hazard await it. And so in every other instance. The man of honour is studious to discharge his duty to the public above every consideration, either of danger or advantage, or of whatever consequence to himself ! and so in every other condition of life. A man of honour will discharge every virtue proper to that condition, with the utmost exactness, and in the highest refinement ! for honour, as I before observed to you, is nothing but the reputation arising from the practice of virtue with regard to

others ; and, with regard to ourselves, the steady practice of it, in all the refinement it is capable of ; especially such virtues as are proper to that peculiar character.

To illustrate this yet farther, in other instances. Honour in a judge is more peculiarly and emphatically a conscientious dispensation of justice, free from all partiality and corruption. In a woman, it is a nice regard to chastity, and the fame of it. In a soldier, fortitude ; in a prince the preservation of his faith, his dominions, and the good of his people. Honour in private life is strict justice, and inviolable regard to promises and engagements of every kind : this is the true notion of honour. Virtue is the standard by which it must be eternally judged ; and whoever goes about to separate it from virtue, in any character, or condition, or circumstance of life, doth at the same instant destroy it, and turn it into infamy ; for infamy is nothing but the fame of vice ; that is, that scandal and evil report which necessarily attend vice and villany of every kind, in the opinion of all wise and good men.

Let duelling then be examined by this test, whether it be honourable or infamous.

And first, the great occasion of duelling is giving the lie ; and a lie is infamous, because it is an imputation upon our virtue of veracity.

Now this imputation is either just or unjust. If the imputation be just, certainly there can be no injury in affixing it. And, as to the indignity that may accrue from such an imputation, the criminal is himself the author of that. You did the injury, and fixed the indignity, when you were guilty of the evil that deserved it. And he that imputeth that guilt to you, doth you no more injury than he that should tell you, you were handsome or valiant, when you were so. And the way to wipe off this imputation, is, to repent, and offend against truth no more.

Well ! but your honour is injured, and you must repair it by fortitude. How ! injure an honour which hath no existence ! what an abuse of words is this ? you forfeited your honour the moment you told the lie. And now you would repair that crime, by committing a greater. You would repair falsehood, by murder. But say the imputation is unjust :

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one would think the natural way of taking off this imputation should be, by manifesting the truth, and letting the whole world see the falsehood of the charge laid against you. And, if this be done, then certainly no infamy rests upon you; but returns that instant upon the author. For then, the lie is, of necessity, and from the nature of the thing, retorted upon him.

But still he hath endeavoured to do you an injury; and perhaps this imputation, although now cleared, hath been of real ill consequence to you: I answer, as to his endeavour of injuring you, he hath infamy for his pains. And if he hath any remains either of equity, or modesty, or good manners, he will take shame to himself for so doing, by a proper submission! if he hath not, he is no otherwise to be accounted of than a bear and a brute! but, however, all brutality is not to be chastised by death. It is sufficiently punished by the natural infamy and contempt that await it. And to them you may refer it. And for this you have an example of sufficient weight in the conduct of Socrates (a man of eminent fortitude) on a like occasion, who being rudely treated by a worthless fellow, as he passed in the public street, took no notice of it: and being asked by one of his companions how he could bear such an indignity from such a miscreant? calmly answered, If an ass should kick at me, would you have me kick again? We have also a like instance in the elder Cato, who, when a beastly fellow spit in his face, only answered, If any one should ask me hereafter whether you have any mouth, I know what to tell him. Thus are trifling indignities to be treated; but if any person hath done you a real injury, the courts of justice are open: and the officers of justice who preside in them are at least as skilful, and as equitable judges of the nature of the injury, and the reparation due to it, as you can be.

Well, but a man of honour scorns to go to law for an abuse, whilst he wears a sword to right himself! what strange language, and how senseless a rodomontade is this! a man of honour scorn the rules of justice! Is then contempt of public justice the effect of honour? or rather is it consistent with any degree of it? Honour is the refinement of virtue! is it virtue to despise the public order and

peace of society? nay, more, to insult it? honour is the exact discharge of every duty proper to our station. Is not submission to public authority the first duty of every man, of every station in society? and is honour a principle contradistinct to virtue and duty of every kind? if it be, away with it from all civil and religious communities. The king upon the throne is bound by the laws of his country; and is a man of honour exempt from them? is he greater than his prince? this pretence then is stupid, and senseless to the last degree. And therefore there is reason to believe, that generally speaking it is but a pretence: and that the real truth is, that most quarrels of this kind are in themselves so very trifling or scandalous, that the authors are ashamed to let them appear in the courts of justice. And, if so, what folly and madness is it to risk your own life and your neighbour's, upon a point of so trivial or shameful a nature, that it will not bear to be seriously examined by the rules of reason and justice.

But still it may be urged, that honour is (with regard to others) the reputation arising from the fame of virtue; and vindicating an injury done to us is an indication of courage; and consequently is attended with a fame of virtue. I answer, that when courage is a virtue, it is always employed in the discharge of some duty, the neglect of which would be a vice. For courage is not in itself a virtue: it is so only when it is employed in a good cause; otherwise it is heat and rashness. For as it is not the punishment that makes the martyr, so it is not fighting that makes the hero: it is the cause that constitutes both. Nay, even fighting in a good cause is not virtue, unless it be also in discharge of duty. And therefore it was that Manlius the Roman consul executed his own son for fighting with Geminus, the general of the Latins, contrary to his orders; although he came off with conquest: as you may read in the 8th book of *Levy*. Here the cause was good. He fought with the enemy of his country. The event also was glorious. He slew and spoiled the hostile general, which was the height of all glory in arms. But yet, all this being against duty, instead of being honourable, became infamous: and he died, like the meanest slave, by the hands of the common executioner.

And

And thus having shewn you the origin of duelling, the present degeneracy of that practice, and the false pretences of honour upon which it is built, I should now proceed to inquire into the true causes of that fashionable infamy. But this (the time not now permitting) must be deferred to another occasion.

SERMON CXXXIV.

The same Subject continued.

EXOD. xx. 13.

Thou shalt not kill.

IN a former discourse on these words, I entered into a dissertation upon the rise and cause of duelling in the world; in which I shewed you, that it had its original from humanity and mercy. When hostile armies, to spare the effusion of human blood, agreed to leave the decision of their disputes to the combat of one or more chosen champions, on either side; and that it was afterwards allowed in Christian countries, on trials of right and innocence, which could not otherwise be so easily decided.

I likewise shewed you the original of that kind of duelling now in fashion amongst us. That it had its beginning from the lie given by Francis the First of France to the emperor Charles the Vth; from whence, giving the lie became the mortal offence among those who have the assurance to call themselves men of honour. On this occasion, I inquired into the true nature of honour, and shewed you that it was nothing with regard to the world, but the fame of virtue; and with regard to ourselves, a refined sense of virtue, and a strictness in the practice of it, even where no law could punish the violation of it, or witness reproach it. I then proceeded to examine the present practice of duelling by this test. And shall now proceed to examine it further upon the same principle.

I observed to you, in the foregoing discourse, that the mortal offence among duellists was giving the lie. Now it is worth while to inquire, whether their resentment of this offence be owing to a right sense of honour; that is, a high regard to the virtue of veracity, and a just indignation for being thought destitute of it; or whether it be only a resentment of custom and conceit, without any regard to virtue.

For if they act in this case from a principle of honour, that is, from a regard to the virtue of veracity, it is plain they will have the same regard to it, in every other circumstance of life. Whereas the very contrary to all this is remarkable in many of them. And nothing is more notorious in their practice than customary lying and swearing, and breach of promises and engagements of every kind. And surely, he that promiseth to pay a just debt on a certain day, and faileth to do so, otherwise than through unavoidable necessity, both lieth, and is unjust at the same time. And in this sense, how many of these heroes are liars upon record, for breach of word and bond: and yet I do not find it customary with them, to challenge the agent who manageth the prosecution, nor the judge who determineth the cause against them, for wounding their honour.

This then is the case: simple lying, is, in the opinion of these brave spirits, a mortal offence; but when perjury or injustice is added to it, then it becomes innocent, and leaves no blemish or stain upon their honour.

From hence it appeareth, that pride is the fountain of this vice. These duellists, not having virtue enough to be ashamed of doing evil, have yet vanity enough not to bear its being imputed to them. And therefore they would reconcile contradictions. They would be honourable in their fame, although they are infamous in their practice. And the way to be so is, to present death upon the point of their sword to any one that shall dare to taint their honour; that honour, which they have long since forfeited, and have now no more title to, than to the money or the estates they have spent. Besides, what but intolerable vanity and impudence can set men so far above all laws, above all government and jurisdiction, as to assume to themselves a right both of judging and executing in their own cause, in direct contempt of all authority, both of God and man? And is the wretch that dare do this a fit member of civil or religious society? or rather should he not be regarded as a monster and outcast of the earth, and banished the society of every thing but chains and dungeons, and the lashes of his own conscience? And therefore if religion and government were no way concerned in this practice,

and the influence of it reached no farther than those infamous wretches who are the common authors of it, nothing were more desirable in society than that this profligate race should go on, like the Cadmean brethren, to butcher one another with all convenient dispatch, and rid mankind of such a pest without the trouble or expence of public executions. But till that be done let them be abandoned like lepers, and let no man that would be clear either in his reputation or in his conscience converse with them, upon pain of infamy. And surely Solomon rightly adviseth, to drive such a one from our conversation. *Cast out the scorner (saith he) and contention shall go out; yea strife and reproach shall cease.*

Another parent of this practice is cowardice. And however strange this may appear at first sight, a little reasoning will clearly evince it to be so. For first, most men, although they have not courage yet greatly affect a reputation of it; that is, such a reputation as may secure them from insults another time. And the way to do this is to seem hot and fiery, and challenge some person of note for the sword; in hopes, that some lucky accident, or the interposition of friends, (which it is in every man's power to procure,) may prevent the ill consequences of the quarrel. And so, they may at once establish their reputation of courage and secure their persons. And all this is plainly the effect of cowardice. And it hath been justly observed by men of experience in transactions of this kind, that outward blusterings are very often only a mask to conceal inward tremblings, and that perhaps on both sides: insomuch, that the words of St. Paul, used upon another occasion, are yet strictly applicable upon this. (2 Cor. vii. 5.) *Without were fightings, within were fears.*

But duelling is yet more so, considered in another light. For cowardice is nothing but fearing against reason. Whereas a rational fear is no more cowardice than a rational hope is presumption and impudence. Now it is agreed among mankind, that of all the duels that have been fought in the world, much the greater number had been declined, did the persons concerned think they could fairly save their honour in doing so. And this, men of known and approved courage are often heard to declare from their own

knowledge, and even in their own case. Now if this be an irrational and unjust fear, then whatever is acted upon this principle is the effect of cowardice. And that it is altogether irrational is evident. For what can be more foolish than to fear infamy from discharge of duty, from obedience to the divine authority, and the laws of the land? for this would be to reverse all the principles and foundations of honour and infamy; to call virtue vice, and vice virtue; and is, literally, to execute that woe upon ourselves which God Almighty hath denounced against all those *that call evil good, and good evil.* And I appeal to every man of common sense, whether any person that had courage enough to act upon these principles, and to declare to the whole world that he did so, could possibly suffer in his reputation of virtue, that is, in his honour, by so doing? or rather would not rise in both, in the esteem of all wise and good men: nay, whether those very braves who extorted this declaration from him, would not, if they had any remains either of virtue or of common sense, reverence him for it in their hearts.

And, God be praised, there is yet so much virtuous courage in the world, that several men of known and approved valour have openly declared against duels; and have refused challenges sent them, in avowance of duty.

And therefore the real truth is, that all those who allow themselves in this practice of duelling, do unknowingly conclude themselves under the basest and most scandalous character in life; cowards to men, and braves to God! *cowards to the opinion of the idlest, the weakest, and the most worthless part of mankind! and braves to the great governor of the universe; to the wisest, the mightiest, and the best of beings!* They fear what a wise man should scorn above all things, the opinion of the thoughtless, the ignorant, and the insignificant. And they scorn what a wise man should fear and reverence above every thing else in the world, the violation of duty, and the wrath of God: so that this practice is plainly an absurd composition of pride, and folly, and cowardice, and hardened impiety.

But here it may be objected, how it is possible for a man to risk his life out of fear! to this I answer, that nothing is more common in the world to this day,

nor

nor more obvious in the history of it throughout all ages; for (as my lord Bacon rightly observeth) there is no passion in the mind so weak but that it mastereth the fear of death; revenge triumpheth over it, love slighteth it, honour aspireth to it, grief flieth to it, and fear preventeth it. Nay pity hath sometimes provoked death; as we find that when Otho slew himself, many others followed out of mere compassion and tenderness to their sovereign. And Otho himself is commonly instanced in the number of those that have died through cowardice. That is, either through fear of death, or infamy and reproach.

Petronius Arbiter, master of Nero's pleasures, cut his veins because his master frowned upon him. Hannibal, for fear of being given up to the Romans, poisoned himself, as did Demosthenes for fear of being given up to Antipater. And Labienus, the historian, mentioned by Seneca, because he would not outlive the infamy of having his books burnt by public edict, burnt himself. Nay the great Cato plainly executed himself through fear of Cæsar's mercy. At least it is certain, that he and all the rest died through cowardice, even upon the principles of heathenism: for all the wiser antients were agreed, that man had no dominion over his own life, but was placed in the world like a sentinel upon his post. And what more scandalous cowardice than to desert the station appointed to us, because of some unforeseen difficulties that attend the maintaining it.

And of all fears the mind can be possessed with, fear of the opinion of fools is, beyond all question, the most scandalous; and, therefore, such as risk their lives upon that principle, are the basest of all cowards both to reason and virtue.

But still custom and the practice of the world is against you. Why, and for that very reason St. Paul adviseth you against it. *Be not conformed to this world, nor to any wicked custom however prevalent in it.* Custom, although founded upon reason and convenience, is at best no rule of action or life. But if it be in opposition to both, it is surely a wretched plea for irrational actions, and is only the last and most senseless refuge of affectation and stupidity. Now duelling is manifestly absurd to the last degree, although it

were not impious. For supposing I am injured, and that I had a right to vindicate myself with my own arm; can any thing be more ridiculous than to put myself upon an equal hazard with him that injured me in that vindication? nay, perhaps upon a much greater. Whereas in reason, I ought to punish his offence, with hazard to him alone that committed it. Else, I only add an injury of my own to one that he hath already done me, or give him a fair chance of doing me a greater, than which nothing can be more absurd. And besides the stupidity of it in this respect, it is absurd also in every other. Forasmuch as it is neither a proper test of the courage of the combatants, nor the justice of their cause. Not of the first, for how can that be a proper arbitration of courage where a coward that is perfect in his sword shall kill the bravest man alive? neither can that be an arbitration of the justice of a cause, where the decision dependeth upon the skill of the parties; and where the injured may fall and the injurer triumph in a second offence, and of a far higher nature than the first.

But besides the folly and stupidity of this practice, I beseech you to consider the iniquity of it. What right have you over that life which you risk, or over that which you invade? Should you attempt upon your neighbour's property by force you would doubtless be deemed a robber and a ruffian. And are you not worse, both in the eye of reason, and the judgment of the law, when you attempt upon his life? for there you add robbery to murder: nay robbery in a variety of relations. The government is robbed of a subject; the society of a member; the widow of a kind and careful husband; and the orphan of a tender parent. And yet he that perpetrates this complicated villany, either out of pique, or pride, or malice, or perhaps out of gaiety of heart, (as the French call it,) would be deemed a man of honour! than which there cannot be a more monstrous abuse of words, or a greater insult upon the common sense of mankind.

It is upon these principles that the Turks suffer no such thing as duels in their dominions. And that reproof, which Busbequius tells us, a Bascha at Constantinople gave a valiant man, for boasting that he had challenged his enemy, is very well worth our notice: "How durst thou

(said he) challenge thy fellow-soldier to
 "a duel? what, was there never a Christian to fight with? do both of you eat the emperor's bread? yet forsooth you must go about to take one another's lives; what precedent had you for this? don't you know that whoever of the twain had died, the emperor had lost a subject?" Whereupon he was immediately hauled to prison, where he lay pining many months, and was at last with difficulty released; yet with the loss of his reputation.

And thus I have examined into the nature of this detestable practice of duelling, and shewn you how destructive it is of all those ends, for which that practice was first introduced and allowed in the world. I have shewn you that in its present degeneracy it is base and infamous. It is infamous in its origin, (the child of vice and ignorance, begotten by pride and folly,) nor is it less infamous in its practice, if acting in direct contradiction to all the principles of honour and virtue, and duty of every kind, can give a just title to infamy. In a word, I have shewn you how stupid, how impious, how abominable it is in all its circumstances and pretences; the vaunt indeed of valour, but for the most part the real effect of cowardice, and that too the most shameful cowardice imaginable; the fear of the opinion of fools; a pretence of heroism, unknown to the great heroes of antiquity, to the Grecians and to the Romans, the greatest examples of mortal prowess: and at the same time greatly degenerating both from the honour and the piety of that practice in our own ancestors.

And now, my brethren, what is the issue of all this extravagance? dreadful either way. If the man hath slain his antagonist, he hath perhaps in his person slain his best friend. At least he ceaseth to be his enemy that instant; and the sword hath no sooner pierced his breast, but horror and remorse have pierced his murderer, have stabbed him to the soul! his vanity sinks into dejection, and his anger into anguish, and all his excess of wrath and revenge rush into yet greater excesses of sorrow, and self-detestation, and all the distractions of distress. The dreadful deed is no sooner done, but he would give the whole world, nay he would almost die to undo it; and doubtless the ex-

change were in many cases wise, were it possible to be effected. If this murderer's death could buy off all the horrors of his conscience, and anguish of his remaining life, given up to remorse and misery; since the same hand that fixed a dagger into his brother's breast, did, in that very act, fix a fury in his own, to sting his conscience, and to poison his quiet to the last moment of his life.

But, my brethren, the greatest terror is yet behind. If this detestable practice ended only in folly, and pride, and tumult, nay if it terminated only in murder and remorse; if blood could expiate the guilt, or the grave hide it, or misery and distraction atone for it, possibly something might be said to palliate the horror of it; but when, in all appearance, the issue is yet more dreadful; when the poor wretch is sent down quick to perdition with all his offences upon his head, and in the very act, perhaps, of the greatest guilt he is capable of committing. Good God! who can bear the horror? *for this shall the earth mourn, and the heavens above be black* (saith the prophet Jeremiah iv. 28.); *for this land shall be visited; for as a fountain casteth out her waters, so she casteth out her wickedness; violence and spoil is heard in her; before me continually is grief and wounds. Be thou instructed, O Jerusalem, lest my soul depart from thee, saith the Lord; lest I make thee desolate; a land not inhabited.* (iv. 7, 8.) *For this gird you with sack-cloth, lament and howl, that the fierce anger of the Lord may be turned back from you.* (iv. 8.)

Let me conclude with that pathetic exhortation of Isaiah to the Jews in the first chapter of his prophecy, (15, 16.) *wash ye, make you clean, put away the evil of your doings, saith the Lord, lest when you spread forth your hands I hide mine eyes from you, yea when you make many prayers I will not hear, your hands are full of blood.* From this guilt, and from the vengeance due to it, God of his infinite mercy deliver this city, and this nation; through the merits and mediation of Jesus Christ.

How criminal and utterly inconsistent with duty the practice of duelling is in the gentlemen of the army, may be seen by the following extract from the articles of war:

"No officer or soldier shall presume to send a challenge to any other officer or soldier, to fight a duel, upon pain, if a commissioned officer, of being

being cashiered, if a non-commissioned officer, or soldier, of suffering corporal punishment, at the discretion of a court-martial."

"Whatsoever officer or soldier shall upbraid another or refusing a challenge, shall himself be punished as a challenger; and we hereby acquit and discharge all officers and soldiers of any disgrace or opinion of disadvantage, which might arise from their having refused to accept of challenges, as they will have only acted in obedience to our orders, and done their duty as good soldiers, who subject themselves to discipline." Articles of War, sect. vii. art. 2, 5.

Claufe in the 19th article of war from the Adventurer, No. 70.

"Nor shall any officer or soldier upbraid another for refusing a challenge; since, according to these our orders, they do but the duty of soldiers, who ought to subject themselves to discipline: and we do acquit and discharge all men who have quarrels offered, or challenges sent to them, of all disgrace or opinion of disadvantage in their obedience hereunto: and whosoever shall upbraid them, or offend in this case, shall be punished as a challenger."

There is another article or clause of an article, upon which a c—t m—l will always break an officer that refuses a challenge, notwithstanding the above clause, and the two articles in Delany's sermons against duels, viz.

"That if any officer does not behave himself like a gentleman, he shall be broke."

S E R M O N CXXXV.

The great Evil, and Folly, and Guilt, of Gaming.

ROM. xii. 2.

Be not conformed to this world; but be ye transformed, by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God.

THE fundamental and essential distinction between the heathen and Christian religion is no-where so clearly alluded to, and in effect summed up, as in the words now recited. *Be not conformed to this world, &c.*

The corruptions of the heathen world depressed their gods into the lowest degree of brutality, transformed them from the character of divine beings into the conditions and qualities of beasts of all kinds; and of consequence debased their adorers in the same proportion. The purpose of the Christian religion is the direct contrary; to raise and to refine. To raise mortals into the noblest characters and conditions of immortal beings, to raise them into the resemblance of the God of heaven.

This is the plain purpose of that noble exhortation in my text, *be not conformed to this world; but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and per-*

fect will of God. The true way of proving what that will of God is, after we have studied it, is to be conformed to it; and consequently, to be as far removed from the condition and character of this world as from darkness to light, and brutal corruption to divine purity. And therefore to exhort, and, as far as in them lieth, to raise men from the grovelling pursuits and purposes of this low earth, to the noblest, the most exalted aims and ends of heavenly piety and purity, is the great business of the ministers of the Gospel. And as the first step to purity is to quit pollution, the business of this, and some following discourses, shall be to warn you of the evil of many practices too prevalent in the world; which have not only lost all their deformity in the higher and more fashionable part of it, but have also gained not only much countenance, but even some degree of credit and applause from them, and therefore, call aloud for rebuke and chastisement. I shall at present mention but these three; duelling, gaming, and luxury.

The first of these I have already treated of in the two preceding discourses. I come now to consider the second, namely, gaming, and to urge the best reasons I can against this wicked and pernicious practice; and, to shew you that it is of the last consequence to you to fly it with the utmost caution.

For, first, all gaming for any thing considerable is founded upon avarice, and is, if not a direct, yet (what is much worse) a deliberate violation of the tenth commandment; and therefore, in this respect, it is perhaps the vice of all others most inexcusable; in crimes of other kinds, surprise, inattention, and violence of passion, although they cannot wholly excuse the committal, yet doubtless they alleviate much of the guilt, but here all these pretences are taken away, and men are so far from being under the influence of any of these alleviating circumstances, that nothing is more notorious than their proceeding to the practice of this vice with the utmost caution and coolness of judgment. And we are told, that it is in contests of this kind as in war; he that hath most presence of mind, and is least embarrassed, is generally most successful.

Besides the deliberate impiety of this vice, it were worth while to consider also

the folly of it. For what can be more absurd than for any man in his senses, without any necessity, to put it to the chance of a die whether his house, his money, or his estate, shall be his own, or another man's? So that nothing but a desperate state of affairs can ground the least appearance of a reasonable plea for such a practice. And even in that case, if the property of a third person can any way be hazarded by the risk we run, then is great dishonesty added to great imprudence; and therefore suppose there were no impiety in this practice, yet such is the folly and danger of it, that you can scarce invent a case where it would be pardonable, even upon the score of stupidity, unless you could suppose a fool of wealth so immensely rich that losses of that kind could not affect the main of his fortune; but that supposition is impossible. Since it is evident, that no fortune can be so large and inexhaustible as to be able to supply an extravagance of this kind. There is no fund adequate to gaming, nor can you imagine any condition of life so immensely affluent as may not be exhausted by an extravagance of this kind in one hour.

Well, but men may limit themselves in this extravagance, and resolve never to exceed a certain sum: true, men may easily make such resolutions; but the difficulty is, how to keep them, when losses and ill luck have fretted their spirits, and inflamed their blood to such a degree that they have lost the thoughts of every thing but recovery and revenge; and I dare say, if it were possible to make an estimate of such resolutions, not one in ten thousand of them hath ever been kept. Nay, is it not madness to expect that men in so raving and distracted a condition, as losing gamesters are often observed to be; that will not stick to abuse their best friends; will swear a thousand vain oaths in a breath; profane, nay blaspheme the sacred name of God, without regret; to expect that creatures in that condition should regard resolutions of caution and prudence is an extravagance of folly almost equal to theirs. And, indeed, such is the distraction and extravagance of men in that condition, that I know nothing more likely to deter any man of reflection either from entering into such a course of life, or continuing in it, than a calm observation of that

series of distractions, which, if I am well informed, (for I thank God I speak not by experience,) tear the breast of a losing gamester in the course of a few hours. The ravings of a fever, and the pangs of a convulsion, are nothing to them: nay, in all appearance, they are the liveliest emblems of the torments of hell; made up of a wild mixture of fury and anguish, regret and despair: so that if nothing but the philosophy of life were concerned in this practice, a man of common prudence would avoid it as a pestilence, as the greatest bane to the peace and tranquillity of life.

But it may be urged, that there are men of such cool and calm tempers as never to be ruffled or heated, either into any discomposure of their temper or disturbance of their understanding on such occasions. And therefore, these men seem to be an exception to all the prohibitions of prudence that lie against gaming. In answer to this, it cannot I believe be denied that there are such men in the world; but then I believe it cannot well be denied that they are men of the worst characters in it; they are men who have studied all the arts of fraud and villany of every kind in perfection; black, saturnine, deliberate villains, who lay themselves out by all the wiles of flattery, wine, seduction, and deceit, to draw the unwary into their snares; and when they once get them there, destroy them without remorse. They are to the light unthinking part of the world, what the spider is to the fly: they wait with cool, deliberate, unwearied patience, till they get their prey within their nets, and then drain out their vitals without remorse; or to speak more properly, enjoy their dying complaints. One would imagine the psalmist had this scene in view in his description of those hardened miscreants, whose snares and nets are spread for the innocent. *He lieth in wait to catch or (as I think might better be translated) seize the poor* (that is the poor deluded mortals that fall into his snares); *he doth seize the poor, when he draweth him into his net.* In his secret places doth he murder the innocent. Forgetting, that God beholdeth all his ungodliness and wrong; and will in his own time repay it with dreadful vengeance. And therefore, well doth St. Paul admonish, (1 Thess. iv. 6.) *That no man go beyond and defraud his brother in any*

any matter; because that the Lord is the avenger of all such.

But still it may be urged, that some men can play with so much prudence and temper as never to engage for more than trifles, consequently to be perfectly unconcerned at any inconsiderable loss that may ensue. True, some men doubtless can do so, and to such, playing for trifles may doubtless be as innocent as any other amusement whatsoever. But how few of these are there in the world, in comparison of those who begin with trifles, and warmed with their losses, are carried on by degrees to boundless extravagance? and even of those who can lose with temper, how many are there, to whom money and time so spent can become an agreeable reflection, and to whom it would not have been infinitely more satisfactory upon reflection, to have employed that time to the attainment of some good purpose in life, or that trifle to the relief of the poor; which, however inconsiderable to the loser, might, to them be of the last consequence? And therefore, although gaming in a low and temperate manner may possibly be numbered among the innocent diversions of life, yet probably it is the most dangerous, and, to the eye of reason, the least desirable of them all.

And if this practice be liable to all these objections and difficulties, under the conduct of the greatest prudence and calmness of temper, in the best company, and in all the alleviating circumstances that can possibly attend it; how infinitely detestable and abominable must it be in all its deformity in places of public resort, and in the society of the most profligate and abandoned part of mankind; for such, beyond all question, are the herd of common gamesters; men of desperate fortunes, no education, no principles, no conscience, no science, (except that of defrauding all they deal with by all the low arts of deceit and perjury,) engaged in such practices as naturally tend to create quarrels and contentions, with all their horrid consequences, and lead men into riots and excesses of every kind. For surely, of these may it be strictly said, what Solomon observeth of the wicked, in the 4th chapter of his Proverbs. *They sleep not, except they have done mischief: and their sleep is taken away, unless they cause some to fall. For they eat*

the bread of wickedness, and drink the wine of violence. And therefore, for men of liberal education and good morals, men of any valuable character, to mix with such a herd, would be an argument of more desperate folly than for a man in sound health to throw himself into a pest house; inasmuch as the corruption of the mind is of vastly worse consequence than the infection of the body. And how hard it will be to avoid such corruption from such society is easy to conceive. *Can a man touch pitch, and not be defiled therewith?* And therefore Solomon adviseth, not only not to enter into the path of the wicked, but carefully to avoid it. *Avoid it, pass not by it, turn from it, and pass away.*

It may be urged in the last place, in behalf of gaming, that many men have raised their fortunes by it. And that since it is not expressly forbidden in the scriptures it may be practised without sin. To this I answer, that although there be no express prohibition of it in scripture, yet is it plainly implied in the tenth commandment. And as to the other part of the objection, it is notorious that a thousand fortunes are ruined by it for one that is raised; so that in this respect, a particular curse seems to attend it. And surely it is little less than madness, to propose to establish your fortune by any method where the odds are in fact so greatly against you. Besides, that gaming is not in the number of those arts by which God Almighty hath ordained that the good things of this world should be acquired; for these are the natural effects of honesty and industry, in the improvement and application of our best abilities both of body and mind. And if God Almighty had made them ordinarily the purchase of chance, and vice, and idleness, he had destroyed the right order of things, and substituted the worst means in the room of the best; and, consequently, taken away much from the wisdom and beauty of his own establishment.

If then, you would avoid a deliberate if not a direct violation of the tenth commandment, together with infinite disquiet and distraction, and the severe reflections of time and fortune ill spent; if you would shun the society of the vilest and most abandoned part of mankind, and the double ruin of soul and body, con-

sequent to such a commerce; if ye would act consistently with those laws of God and man that are the rules of your duty, and that wise order of things established by the divine wisdom for the attainment of the good things of this world, renounce that impious, that absurd, that detestable practice of gaming.

SERMON CXXXVI.

The great Evil, and Folly, and Guilt of Luxury in Dress.

ROM. xii. 2.

Be not conformed to this world, but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God.

THE next corruption I proposed to guard you against was luxury; and this I shall consider under the two heads of dress and food.

And first for luxury of dress. Dress being intended for distinction of the several orders and stations of life, as well as for ornament and security from the weather, it is no wonder, if in the wiser nations and ages of the world, regulations in this point have been thought worthy the consideration of the legislature, as a matter of great importance to the manners of mankind; to keep the several orders and degrees of men within their own sphere, and their own district; and not suffer them to encroach either upon the character or condition of their superiors. And this, without question, was of excellent use, to temper the minds of mankind, and abate that vanity which so strongly exerts itself in the spirits of most men; or if not abate it, at least direct it to some useful and excellent purpose of life. Thus,

For example, in the common wealth of Rome, (in all its ages of virtue and discipline,) a Roman knight, with the abilities of an angel, was confined to the equestrian robe and ring. Nor could the wealth and merit of ten senators united in his own person, purchase him any distinction of dress superior to his own order; so that, in this case, either his vanity of wealth and power must subside, or else it must exert itself in such acts of virtue as might raise him to a higher station, and entitle him to nobler ornaments, and badges of more exalted distinction; and this without question was of excellent use.

But when luxury increased with wealth and conquest, and vanity abounded as virtue decayed, then did they find out new arts of varying, and adorning, and rendering that dress more luxurious and expensive, which, for fashion and kind, they were under a necessity of continuing still the same. And this luxury of dress, as well as that of food, being found to have very ill effects upon the morals of the citizens, and also to be of very ill consequence to the public, was often regulated by sumptuary laws, which limited the expence of clothing to a determined sum; and such as was not to be exceeded but upon severe penalties. And this again, repressed the exorbitant vanity of mankind, and reduced it, in some measure, within those bounds and limitations proper to each character and condition in life. And this hath often been practised, more or less, by all wise nations of the world, as the exigency of the times required.

And I believe it must be owned, that if this article of luxury ever needed a restraint in these nations, it needeth it now in the highest degree, and with the utmost severity.

It is but too notorious, that the pride and power of a vain neighbouring nation hath infected the whole world around it with vanities of various kinds: particularly that of light, luxurious, expensive dress; which taking root in a rich nation (like evil weeds in a luxuriant soil) hath over-run it in a monstrous manner, not only to the disgrace of its native modesty and decency, but greatly to the destruction of its true religion and virtue.

There is something in the glare of a gaudy dress that tendeth not only to dissipate the spirits, but even to tincture the mind with congenial vanities, with light fantastic ideas, and specious appearances, and of consequence, to take off the attention from more serious, solid, and important attachments and pursuits; and so become an inlet to the worst vanities that can infect the mind; and this naturally warps men from the ways of truth and virtue: and as this induceth an indisposition to graver and more useful pursuits, it also createth a necessity of greater expence; at the same time that it rebateth that spirit of industry and honest arts which should support it. And what is the consequence, when this love of vanity hath

hath once taken possession of the soul, it must be indulged and supported at all hazards. And as this cannot be done by that industry, and those honest arts which it hath totally driven away, it must be done by evil arts of some kind or other; and often of all kinds.

The history of Gehazi in the 5th chapter of the 2d book of kings, affordeth a fine illustration of those observations now laid down.

What the true principle and source of his guilt was, will best appear from his punishment; which, being dictated by the spirit of God, was, beyond all doubt, rightly directed.

When Naaman was healed of his leprosy by obeying the directions of the prophet Elisha, he returned in gratitude to acknowledge the obligation, and earnestly intreated the prophet to accept from him some valuable proofs and tokens of his gratitude; which the prophet having absolutely refused, nevertheless, his servant thought that was an occasion to enrich and adorn himself, which was not by any means to be lost; and therefore he resolved at once to disgrace his master, and in him the religion of his God, to violate the truth, and to defraud Naaman, rather than leave his own vicious appetites unindulged. Doubtless, he deemed the Syrian garments proper ornaments to adorn his person; and when that was done, the other conveniences of life must be adjusted and suited to them: this consideration made olive-yards and vineyards but necessary conveniences suited to the other circumstances of his dignity.

The spirit of the prophet attended him through the inmost recesses and windings of his heart, (which plainly demonstrate it to be the spirit of God,) saw clearly into his most secret purposes, and immediately suggested a punishment most admirably accommodated to all the circumstances of his guilt; he inflicted a distemper upon him which made all those vanities useless at once. Syrian ornaments would but ill become a leperous carcase, and would in effect but make his deformities more conspicuous. And, indulgence of appetite would but more inflame his incurable disease; which must go down to his posterity together with his ill-acquired inheritance.

Good God! how many unhappy Gehazis are there in the world, who tram-

ple under foot every duty they owe to God and man, and derive to themselves worse than leprosy, in consequence of their vanities of dress and unruly indulgence of appetite; and convey the taint (but mostly, without the inheritance) to their posterity.

The love of pomp, and glare of dress, is a false and fantastic appetite; and all such are gratified with more difficulty; and not only so, but draw after them many other congenial and vexatious vanities, leading to enormities of every kind.

Gehazi's guilt was a taint that had infected his soul; and it was chastised by an infectious disease that bore an amazing and a dreadful analogy to it.

O my brethren, sin is to the soul, what the worst diseases are to the body; ulcers, and loathsome corruptions of every kind. And the disease now inflicted upon Gehazi, was at once a most lively emblem, and dreadful chastisement of it; at once its shocking picture and punishment. How finely, and how dreadfully instructive is this history to us; and how strictly and religiously should we be upon our guard, lest the inward defilements of our sins should descend like those outward pollutions of Gehazi to our latest posterity, and derive, not only mortal diseases, but immortal miseries upon them.

That the people of this nation, and this city in particular, are over-run with strong appetites and unruly vanities, of various kinds, as Gehazi was; is a truth equally lamentable and notorious.

This my brethren, this is the true source of those pests that infect your cities, and infest your highways. This is the true cause why so many of your sons grow up, not as healthful, but as poisonous plants. *That your daughters grow up, not as the polished corners of your temples, but as the polluted corners of your cities.* This is the true source of that great decay, that leading into captivity, and that complaining in your streets, far beyond the corruption and calamity of all former ages.

This is the true reason why so many of one sex openly act as if the laws of the gospel were totally reversed to them; forgetting, or entirely neglecting to adorn themselves with *modest apparel, with shamefacedness and sobriety.* But on the contrary, glaring in the eyes of the world,

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with broidered hair, with gold, and pearls, and costly array; and an equal contempt of modesty and sobriety.

This is the true reason why all those corruptions which the prophet Ezekiel so loudly crieth out against in Jerusalem, (chap. xxii. xxiii.) are now so flagrant and notorious in this city; of whose inhabitants (I mean too many of them) we may truly say, as he doth: *in thee have they set light by father and mother. In the midst of thee, have they dealt by oppression. Thou hast despised mine holy things, and hast profaned my sabbaths. In thee are men that carry tales (and we may add all weapons of violence) to shed blood. In the midst of thee they commit lewdness. Thou hast greedily gained of thy neighbours by extortion; and hast forgotten me, saith the Lord God. Behold therefore, I have smitten my hand on thy dishonest gain, and at thy blood which hath been in the midst of thee. Can thine heart endure, or can thine hands be strong, in the days that I shall deal with thee. I the Lord have spoken it, and I will do it. Behold, I will deliver thee into the hand of them whom thou hatest. They shall strip thee out of thy clothes, and take away thy fair jewels; and they shall deal with thee hatefully. And shall take away all thy labour; and shall leave thee naked and bare.*

It appeareth clearly from the course of Ezekiel's prophecy, that the people of Israel had been bewitched by the grandeur, gaiety, and gorgeous apparel of the Chaldeans, to imitate their luxuries, their vanities, and in the end, even their idolatries and abominations of every kind. And after God had, by his prophets, frequently exhorted, admonished, and warned them from those dangerous and deceitful imitations and practices, he at length declareth, that he will totally give them up in the most abject servitude, to the absolute dominion of that nation whose ways they had so wantonly learned, and whose vanities they had so wantonly and wickedly enslaved themselves to, in the fulness of their pride and wealth.

The time is too recent to be yet forgotten, and I hope too memorable to be ever wholly forgotten; since our neighbouring nation, and almost natural enemies, whose vanities we so fondly adopt, and so idly and destructively imitate, had laid a deep and dangerous scheme to oppress us by a sudden and strong invasion,

to oppress us unarmed and unprepared; had not God of his infinite and unmerited mercy, timely and most wonderfully interposed, for our preservation, by the destruction of their fleet in their own harbour; by the destruction of the proud in their own deep waters: which, if they had not been so destroyed, would, in all human probability, have gone over our soul.

Here a question naturally occurs; are we in any degree amended by this deliverance; by this late deliverance added to many former? alas, it is but too true that we are not. That we are rather become more abandoned in our abominations; inasmuch, that we may cry out against this people as the prophet Isaiah did against his own; *Ab, sinful nation! a people laden with iniquity; a seed of evil-doers: children that are corrupters; they have forsaken the Lord; they have provoked the Holy One of Israel unto anger; they are gone away backward.*

Why should ye be stricken any more; ye will revolt more and more: the whole head is sick, and the whole heart is faint.

From the sole of the foot even unto the head, there is no soundness in it; but wounds and bruises, and putrifying sores.

My brethren, a natural body in this state hath rarely any relief but from caustics and incisions; from the sharpest and severest methods of cure. States and communities of men, in the same degree of moral corruption, have rarely any relief, but in moral caustics and incisions; in chastisements and calamities of the severest kinds. These chastisements, the divine justice, and even the divine mercy, call upon him to inflict; and nothing but sincere repentance and reformation can avert the vengeance.

My brethren, the leprosy of sin can only be cured as Naaman's was, by washing; by washing, as Naaman did, not once only, but over and over. By washing seven times; not in the flood of Jordan, but in the laver of regeneration; in the stream of pure and purifying repentance.

If you obey the prophet Isaiah, as Naaman did the prophet Elisha, your pollutions shall certainly be done away, as his were. The prescriptions of both prophets are exactly the same, differing only in the means. Elisha prescribed a natural cleansing in Jordan, endued with

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a miraculous power by that spirit which inspired the prophet. Isaiah prescribeth a moral cleansing by repentance and amendment, endued with a no less miraculous power by the mercy of God in Christ Jesus. *Wash ye, make ye clean, put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes, cease to do evil, learn to do well.*

Believe me my brethren, this is the only prescription that can purify guilt; that can avert the deadly and dreadful consequences of it, even in this world; and the infinitely more dreadful miseries of the next. This repentance, and this reformation, the only cleansing lenient; mollifying and healing medicines of moral corruption, he of his infinite mercy pour into our hearts, for Jesus Christ's sake, our only mediator and redeemer.

SERMON CXXXVII.

The great Evil and Guilt of Luxury in Eating and Drinking.

A CHRISTMAS SERMON.

ROM. xiii. 13.

Let us walk honestly as in the day; not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying.

By the *day* in the text is meant the glorious light of the gospel, by which the darkness of the heathen world was dispersed and done away; and therefore, those vices and irregularities which men indulged in the dark, when the shameful and filth of their vile practices were hidden from notice, and from censure, they should now shun and be ashamed of in the sunshine of the gospel; when the deformity and indecency of such a conduct, could no longer be concealed, could not possibly escape the eye of their own conscience, and the observation and reproach of the whole world around them. *Let us walk honestly*, in the original *εὐσχημονῶ*, decently, and gracefully, that is, let us live with the utmost regard to that beauty and becomingness of virtue which will make the conduct of a good Christian lovely in the eyes of all that behold it; even sots of the night are ashamed to expose their freaks and their follies to the eye of day. How much more should the children of the light fear to sin in the face of the sun? If the light of the day be a natural restraint upon intemperance and excess, much more should the

light of the gospel. If sots of the night revere the light of the sun, how much more should the children of the day revere the sun of righteousness. How much more should they fly from, and be confounded at the sense of those impurities and pollutions which they cannot possibly indulge without bidding defiance to every degree of decency and shame, and doing violence to the *tender mercy of God, whereby the day spring from on high hath visited us.*

Let us walk honestly as in the day; not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying.

And in order to prevail upon you to do so, the business of this discourse shall be to expose the guilt, the folly, and deformity of luxury and intemperance in eating and drinking, expressed in the text by the terms rioting and drunkenness, or as it is in the original, *καμνησὶ καὶ μεθαι.*, feastings and sottings. And to this purpose, I shall first shew you what this luxury is; and secondly, I shall endeavour to trace out the evils that attend it.

And in order to find out the true nature of this vice, it is necessary to observe, that whereas food was appointed by Almighty God for our preservation and support; therefore, in order to attain that end more surely and universally, he hath annexed pain and uneasiness to the want of it, in order to excite men to their own preservation; and likewise placed a good deal of pleasure in the gratification of that want; that so we might enjoy our being at the same time that we support it; and be allured so to do.

From hence it comes to pass, that some men, mistaking the true end of food, which is preservation, have placed it entirely in pleasure, and the gratification of appetite; that is, in truth, they have mistaken the means for the end, and used them accordingly. Now this is just as weak, as if a sick man should imagine that the virtue of the physic consisted in the gilding and sweetening of the pill, and so should take drugs, not for health, but for pleasure. Now this properly constituteth the idea of luxury; when men, forgetting or disregarding the true end of food, place it entirely in the gratification of appetite. And hence it is, that luxury is the great inducement to intemperance; when men eat to satisfy the demands

mands of nature, they are seldom in danger of excess, because the demands of nature are easily satisfied. But when men eat for pleasure, they eat beyond the demands of nature, and are drawn into all the evils of intemperance. And hence hath proceeded that endless variety of meats and sauces, contrived with so much labour and expence, and with such curious adjustments and compositions of taste, as have erected the art of eating into a science of no mean figure and esteem in the world; and as it is ordinary with mankind to run into endless error, when once they forsake the ways of nature and providence, so hath it happened remarkably in this case. And perhaps the human folly never was carried to greater extravagance than in this article of luxury: witness that mad and incredible profusion we meet with in the lives of the Roman emperors; feasts continued for whole nights and days together; and emetics frequently applyed to unload the full stomach and prepare for it new luxury; and all this to obtain a pleasure, which the exercise of a few hours, in innocent recreation, or useful labour, would purchase for them in much greater perfection; and save all that rack of invention that hath been employed in contriving, as well for the expence as poignancy of food. Nor is the folly of this vice more conspicuous on the score of profusion than it is on account of that infirmity of body and mind consequent to it. For it is beyond all question, that he that eateth to luxury doth not feed for health, but for disease. For nature delighteth in simplicity and temperance, and variety of delicious foods oppresses the stomach whilst they please the palate; and consequently, must of necessity be thrown off, crude and ill digested into the blood. The body, under the weight of too much food, is just in the case of a flower oppressed with rain; that which was intended to administer to its life and beauty, now serveth only to depress and to deface it. Nor is the mind in a better condition than the body; for when the stomach is overcharged, the spirits are so entirely employed upon the business of digestion, that the mind is left wholly unattended. And indeed nature is not sufficient for two such demands at the same time; being unable to bear the double expence, of ministering at once to reason and to

digestion; to reason in its due demands, and to digestion in extravagance. Now all this considered, it is no wonder that luxury hath always been made the mark of a depraved and degenerate age; and that all those that have set up for amending the lives of mankind, and reducing them to the best and most perfect state they were capable of, have always made temperance a fundamental in their regulations. And for the same reason, we are commanded in the scriptures (infinitely the wisest, the most perfect system of philosophy, that ever was formed) to *make no provision for the flesh to fulfil the lusts thereof*. The natural demands of hunger and thirst are so strong, that they will not fail to call of themselves for a necessary supply of food, and stand in no sort of need of any artificial incitements or provocatives to appetite; and when these are temperately indulged health is preserved, and both the body and the mind are in a condition to discharge their several functions with vigour. The business of digestion being quickly over, the animal spirits are infinitely at the devotion of the mind, and the student feels no difficulty in his intellectual pursuits; and the man of the world feels no difficulty in application and attention to his business from the weight of fulness and stupidity of indigestion. The body likewise, having taken in no more food than the necessities of nature called for, can lay up no supplies either for vices or diseases; and by this means, many of those evils are prevented to which fulness naturally leadeth, and to which so inactive and sedentary a condition of life as students, citizens, and many men of various occupations are generally engaged in, would otherwise render them too obnoxious.

It hath been finely observed of intemperate eating, that if it had been appointed as a punishment, he had been reckoned a more than ordinary tyrant that invented it. And yet surely, the evils that such a one would bring upon mankind, were light and inconsiderable, in comparison of those which mankind bring upon themselves by luxury of food; for the pain of forced fulness would quickly be over, either from nature's refusing to bear the burden any longer, or from artificial reliefs; whereas, the ill effects of luxury increase with our years, and

and, for the most part, continue with our lives: so that the difference is here; the tyrant might torment you for a little time with forced fulness; whereas, luxury tempteth you to torment yourselves for the best part of your lives.

Again, as temperance enableth both the body and mind to discharge their several offices with ease and satisfaction, so also doth it help to redeem a considerable portion of our time for that discharge. Sleep is the natural relief of toil and weariness: that is, when the animal spirits are exhausted by the labours of the day, men naturally fall into that state of rest and insensibility which we call sleep; that during that season, the body may have a sufficient recruit of spirits for the labours of the ensuing day. But when the weight of fulness and indigestion are added to the other labours of life, and a man goeth to bed, not only to recover his wasted spirits, but to get rid of an incumbered brain, and a loaded stomach, it is evident the business of sleep is doubled; and a man must of necessity rest much longer, than he otherwise should need to do. And this is the only natural, and true way of accounting for some men's invincible sluggishness, and that strange difficulty that is found in forcing them to the early duties of life, especially in their younger years, when their spirits abound, and consequently the waste is easier recruited.

What I have here observed concerning luxury of food, I would have understood as well of luxury in drinks as in meats; because that is at least equally pernicious. And since all drinking, as well as eating for pleasure, abstracted from the demands and ends of nature, the support of health and strength, the enjoyment of social, temperate, and innocent festivity, and the necessary relief of care: I say all eating and drinking abstracted from these ends, properly constitute the idea of luxury; and are at the same time, the vices of drunkenness and intemperance. Therefore I shall consider this kind of drinking, in the remaining part of this discourse, under that head.

And indeed, intemperate drinking is the most dangerous of all vices you can possibly fall into; and for this plain reason, because that by this you are put into the power of every other vice. So that we may say of this, as of the evil

spirit in the gospel, it is not a single vice, but it is legion. And hence it is, that when the apostle exhorteth us, to *walk honestly as in the day, not in rioting and drunkenness*: he immediately addeth, *not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying*. These vices being the natural effects of luxury and intemperance, by which the blood is inflamed, the head disturbed, and the heart perverted; and men become a prey to every temptation, and every folly in life. And as this is true of mankind in every period, it is more remarkably so in youth. For although sottishness be more shameful and indecent in old age, it is more dangerous and pernicious in youth; and for this plain reason, youth is itself a drunkenness, that is, there is a giddiness and a fervour that attend it, apt enough of themselves to throw you into too many extravagancies; and God knows there is no need of any artificial or additional inflammation to your blood at that period. You are already, from the condition of your constitution at that period, too much in the power of your passions; and it is by no means your interest to inflame them to boundless sway; but quite otherwise, to restrain them by the united force of reason and abstinence.

The business of reason, and religion, of education, and discipline, is to calm and cool the passions; the business of riot and drunkenness, is to inflame and boil them up to tenfold extravagance. Hence all that variety of wild and irrational pursuits and projects, which at once depress and dishonour our nature, mad mirth, senseless and sottish fondness, causeless quarrels, vain and wicked vaunts, open and avowed licentiousness, and an utter defiance of God and goodness.

Solomon hath summed up the train of extravagance and evil adventures such men run through in the course of a drunken revel, with admirable beauty and great exactness, in the 23d chapter of his proverbs, 29th and following verses: *Who hath woe? who hath sorrow? who hath contentions? who hath wounds without cause? who hath redness of eyes? they that tarry long at the wine, they that go to seek mixt wine.* It is in the original they that seek mixture, that is, they who mingle drinks of several sorts to render them at once more alluring and more intoxicating. He then addeth that excellent advice to his son: *Look not thou*

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upon the wine when it is red, when it giveth his colour in the cup. When it moveth itself aright. At the last it biteth like a serpent, and stingeth like an adder. Thine eyes shall behold strange women, and thine heart shall utter perverse things. Yea thou shalt be as he that lieth down in the midst of the sea, or as he that lieth upon the top of a mast. They have stricken me shalt thou say, and I was not sick; they have beaten me, and I felt it not. And then followeth a greater evil and infatuation than all the rest. When I shall awake, I shall seek it yet again; notwithstanding all the dangers the sot ran through, and the indignities he endured in his riot, yet no sooner doth he awake, but he runneth the same round of folly and extravagance over again. The drunkard is emphatically the fool in the Proverbs, who returneth to his folly as the dog to his vomit. He hath no sooner slept off, or heaved off one surfeit, but he swalloweth down another. Again he beholdeth strange women, and again he uttereth perverse things, until he end in fevers or phrenzies; or fall a sacrifice to a freak, or die by the sword of his dearest companion; murdering perhaps, and murdered at once; and goeth down quick to perdition, where only he can meet with greater monsters, and more abandoned reprobates than those he left behind him, whose conversation he is now best fitted for, by a long course of impiety and profaneness, and the worst abuse of the patience and long-suffering of Almighty God.

The business of reason and religion (as I before observed) is to improve and perfect our nature, to raise it to its original excellency; to fit us for the conversation of angels, and arch-angels, and the spirits of good men made perfect. But the business of riot and intemperance is to sink us gradually into destruction, to debase and to deprave; to debase us into brutes, and to deprave us into fiends; to fit us for the society of hell.

Orpheus torn to pieces by Bacchanals, is a fine emblem of the ruin of every thing that is good and amiable by riot and excess. Every passion inflamed by wine is a mad Bacchanal, at mortal enmity with art and elegance and the harmony of the mind. Every ornament and accomplishment of the soul must one day fall before it, must one day fall by the

fate of Orpheus, and perish piece-meal. And, to crown all, besides the ill consequences that drunkenness hath in common with other evil habits, it hath this dreadful effect peculiar to itself, that a long habit in this vice may make it at last necessary. Nor can those who have long indulged it, ordinarily live without it. And what a dreadful reflection is it to think, that we have lived so in the world as to make our vices necessary to our very being.

I will add one observation more; and that is, that it is the vice of all others that doth the greatest dishonour to human nature. We think it argument enough against other vices that they debase us to brutes; but this doth more, it putteth us vastly beneath them. And a swine wallowing in the mire is not half so hateful, nay, not half so beastly a sight as a drunkard in his own excesses.

It was a practice with the Spartans to expose their slaves drunk to the sight of the ingenuous youth, to deter them from so shameful a vice, by so sad an example; and no doubt nothing could strike the mind with abhorrence of such a brutal practice like such a sight: but still methinks it was too great an indignity to be put even upon the Helotæ, upon the lowest and meanest rank of human slaves! nay, it were, beyond all question, an indignity even upon a brute of better species; and if so, how scandalous must this practice be, how shameful beyond all reproach, in men! in creatures that value themselves upon the use of reason, and the advantages of religion.

I have omitted in this discourse, or rather, have not insisted upon, some of the common topics against drunkenness, and indeed I hope the stupidity, the infamy, the brutality of this vice, added to the inflammation and outrage of every passion occasioned by it, and being thrown into the power of every other vice, when it is in possession of you, will be abundantly sufficient to dissuade and deter you from the practice of it.

I cannot conclude upon this subject, without admonishing my hearers, that of all the various sorts of sottishness, that of going early to the wine is surely the greatest and the most unpardonable. The pretence of this practice, is drinking to get an appetite; but the true purpose of it, is drinking to destroy it; and is doubt-

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less one of the most pernicious practices that ever obtained among mankind. Other fots redeem some portion of their time to their duty, but morning drunkards sacrifice the whole. Here intemperance subdueth by surprise, and maketh speedy progress from one degree to another, till riot succeed to excess, and every folly and every vice succeed to riot; till sottishness subdue itself, and stupidity is oppressed by sleep. Thus time, health, and fortune, are wasted at once; and industry, wealth, and virtue, give way to sloth and poverty, and all the infinite evils that await them.

Give me leave to add one short reflection to what hath been said, and so conclude.

The Festival of our blessed Saviour's nativity hath succeeded in the same season of the year with the ancient Saturnalia, an heathen feast, instituted in memory of the golden age, which flourished as they deemed under the reign of Saturn; when all mankind lived in freedom, and ease, and plenty; and the distinctions of bond and free, of tyrant and slave, were unknown. In this season, masters forgot their tyranny, and servants threw off their chains; and an image of the original ease, festivity, and freedom, was exhibited to the world. When Christianity was established in the place of heathenism, it quickly came to be understood that true liberty was now restored with it; that mankind were now redeemed from the slavery of sin and Satan, and restored to the original freedom of the sons of God. From hence, they quickly came to be considered upon the foot of their natural relation and original equality; *that in Christ Jesus there is neither Greek, nor Jew, Barbarian, or Scythian, bond or free; but a new creature.*

Those who were before aliens and enemies now became brethren, sons of the same first parents, servants of the same God, and heirs of the same salvation. In this way of thinking, tyrants threw down their scourges, and slaves shook off their chains. The consequence of which was, ease and equanimity among the lower part of mankind; condescension, humanity, beneficence, and charity among the higher; and love, joy, innocent festivity, and freedom among all. How blessed a scene was this, and how

noble a picture of the original simplicity, felicity, and equality, was exhibited to the earth!

This was the festival of Christmas in its original institution; then were the house, the board, the arms, and the heart open to the stranger, the friendless, the fatherless, and the widow; and the poor tenant was welcomed and levelled with his lord. Alas, these happy times are now vanished; the great æra of the Christian redemption is now remembered in nothing but the name: that spirit of irreligion which is gone out into the world, together with its vile and genuine offspring, the sordid, selfish, insatiable spirit of avarice and private luxury, have either devoured or driven away the generous and the God-like spirit of public hospitality, attended with innocent and social mirth. Or, if there be yet any remains of the ancient and hospitable festivity, they are, for the most part, such only as are seen in the revels of those who, as St. Peter expresseth it, take pleasure to *riot in the day time, spots they are and blemishes in these feasts of love*, and bring reproach and infamy upon this sacred and solemn festival. *Having eyes full of adultery, beguiling unstable souls, alluring through the lusts of the flesh. Through much wantonness those that were clean escaped from them who live in error. While they promise liberty they themselves are the servants of corruption.* These are they upon whom the woes and vengeance of God are justly and peculiarly denounced in the sacred writings. *Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil, (saith the prophet,) woe unto them that are mighty to drink strong drink, that rise up early in the morning that they may follow strong drink, that continue until night till wine inflame them. And the harp, and the viol, and the tabret, and the pipe, and wine, are in their feasts; but they regard not the work of the Lord, neither consider the operations of his hands. Therefore bell hath enlarged itself, and opened her mouth without measure, and their glory, and their multitude, and their pomp, and he that rejoiceth, shall descend into it. Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth, and walk in the way of thy heart, and in the sight of thine eyes, but know that for all these things God will bring thee into judgment, for time mispent, and for talents misapplied; for health impaired and life cut short; for the ends of infinite wisdom defeated and inverted;*
for

for the best blessings of life converted into a curse; either cruelly withheld from all the duties and delights of charity, or more cruelly wasted in licentiousness for the propagation of evil principles and the infection of evil example; in one word, for the best gifts of God, either diverted from their true ends or abused to the worst. *For all these things God will bring thee into judgment.* His just vengeance will await thee in this world, and pursue thee into the next; *where the worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched.* From this dreadful doom, and unutterable woe, God of his infinite mercy deliver us all, through the merits and mediation of Jesus Christ.

SERMON CXXXVIII.

By THOMAS CONEY, D. D.

Prebendary of Wells, &c.

Honesty and Plain-dealing an usual Bar to Honour and Preferment, but yet to be pursued from higher Motives.

NUMB. XXIV. 11.

— I thought to promote thee unto great honour; but lo, the Lord hath kept thee back from honour.

THESE words are the passionate and angry resentment of Balack king of Moab, against Balaam the forcerer, for not cursing the persons, and blasting the designs of the children of Israel. For this people coming up in a numerous body from Egypt to take possession of the promised land, and to be invested with the rights and inheritance of their forefathers, made a very formidable figure *in the plains of Moab*, (Numb. xxii. 1, 3.) and struck a terror and confusion into all the neighbouring countries. Balack and his subjects were strangely surprized at the greatness of their numbers, and the extravagancy of their demands, and *fore afraid, lest they should lick up all that was round about them, as the ox licketh up the grass of the field.* (ver. 4.) For such a potent and numerous enemy, conducted from a foreign country by a constant series of miracles, seemed to be picked out for some great design, and to be employed as the instruments of Pro-

vidence to chastise the rebellion of other nations. This made the Moabites apprehensive of their own danger, and fearful where the storm would discharge itself. The judgment was very visible and apparent, and the sword of justice hung threatening over their heads: their sons and daughters expected to be carried into a foreign captivity, and desolation and famine were just approaching their native country.

Under such a melancholy and dismal prospect of things, king Balack took all politic measures of securing his person, and defending his dominions; and, forasmuch as he found himself inferior to the enemy, and unable to dispute the point fairly with them in the field, he had recourse to indirect practices, and endeavoured to supply by stratagem what was wanting in strength, and by the arts of magic and sorcery to vanquish those whom chariots and armies could make no impression upon.

Balaam, the son of Beor, was the person pitched upon for this notable piece of service, and the depth of his learning, and the reputation of his sanctity, gave fresh life to the expectation of the Moabites, and buoyed them up with the hopes of success in the undertaking. But he, being over-ruled by the spirit of prophecy, and receiving counter-orders from the true God, was unable to find *any enchantment against Jacob, or divination against Israel*; (Num. xxiii. 23.) and so was obliged to alter the measures of his proceedings, and to turn the desired curse into a blessing.

This so highly provoked the displeasure, and raised the indignation of the king that he banished the enchanter from his presence, and with a seeming air of pride and contempt told him, what honours and preferments his plain-dealing and sincerity had deprived him of. *I thought to promote thee unto great honour; but lo, the Lord hath kept thee back from honour.*

These words seem to be founded upon that common notion which some great men have, that they who minister in holy things, are tied up to no other rules but those of their interest; that religion is a craft, and conscience a jest; that prayers are an idle amusement, and the power of the keys entirely at the service of the prince.

I shall

I shall therefore beg your leave to let Balaam represent that order of men which the king thought him no inconsiderable member of, and that you would not at present load his memory with too much infamy and disgrace, nor sink his character below the opinion which the court had of it: for though he was misguided in the object of his worship, and took wrong measures in his applications to the Deity, yet his office was esteemed sacred by the heathens, and his reputation was great in his country; his person was revered by all, and his present conduct was to be particularly applauded by those who were under the same unfortunate mistakes with himself. How justly soever the worshippers of the true God may blame the superstition of the forcerer, and reflect upon the madness of the prophet, yet Balak, being under the prepossessions of a false religion, and the guidance of an erroneous conscience, could not but have a great veneration both for the art and person of Balaam.

Upon this supposition therefore (namely, the opinion of Balaam's being a prophet, and the respect which was thought due to his function) I shall treat of that rough and haughty answer which Balak gave him for not cursing his enemies: *I thought to promote thee unto great honour; but, lo, the Lord hath kept thee back from honour.*

These words (as appears by the circumstances of the foregoing story, and the remarks I have made upon the context) do represent to us that extravagant notion of power which Balak, as a king, thought himself invested with to command the service of Balaam, (whom he respected as a true prophet,) to do a thing illegal in itself and inconsistent with his office, upon a prospect of that honour and preferment which he was in a capacity to oblige him with.

This remarkable transaction between the king and the prophet, will furnish me with these following observations for the subject of my ensuing discourse:

First, That the generality of superiors, by a stretch of their authority, are willing to demand illegal and unwarrantable things from ecclesiastical persons.

Secondly, That the method and artifice by which they think to prevail over mercenary men, is the specious offer of preferment and honour.

Thirdly, That the common way to worldly grandeur is to study the tempers, and conform to the principles of those who are in a condition to oblige them.

Fourthly, That plain-dealing is the usual bar and impediment to a good man's advancement.

Fifthly, That it is still the duty of a good man, notwithstanding the allurements and temptations of this world, to act agreeably to his conscience, and the laws of his God.

Sixthly, That a person who acts thus impartially between the commands of his prince and the dictates of his conscience, shall find infinite comfort and satisfaction, although he misses those advantages which flatterers and temporizers may gain at the present.

First, The first thing observable is, that superiors, by a stretch of their authority, are willing to demand illegal and unwarrantable things from ecclesiastical persons.

Notwithstanding we have a common rule and standard of our actions, and the boundaries of good and evil are sufficiently fixed and determined, yet great men, who are given up to lust, and slaves to ambition, are for removing the fences at pleasure, and establishing iniquity by a law: their stations make them headstrong and assuming, positive and imperious; and the not well understanding the limits of their power, puts them upon a wrong use and application of it. Hence it is that they grow fond of themselves and disrespectful to others; look upward with envy, and downward with disdain; are too big to be controuled, and too wise to err. They think good and evil to be arbitrary things, and themselves persons commissioned to enact them at pleasure. They are for a latitude in principles, and a licentiousness in practice; for stretching the prerogative to the prejudice of conscience, and for cutting the knot which they cannot handsomely untie.

Now it is much to be feared that the easiness and compliance of some, who ought to have more courage and fidelity in their sacred function, has given too great encouragement to the exorbitant demands of their superiors. For though we should grant an absolute power in the prince, and exact an unconditional obedi-

ence from the subject; yet does it not follow that this power should be transferred from civil to matters purely spiritual, or that this obedience should impose upon the consciences of men, or evacuate the commands of God: for this would be to blend and confound two distinct and independent jurisdictions, and shamefully to depress our God that we might exalt his vicegerent: it would be to stretch the prerogative, and confine the priesthood; to strip the church, and enrich the state; to be stingy to the mitre, and too liberal to the crown; to be passive to a fault, and even loyal to a sin. In short, it would be to flatter princes with a power which God never entrusted them with; to compliment away the liberty which Christ has given to his church, and to persuade our ecclesiastical governors to stand for ciphers in their own courts of judicature. An excess this way has, without doubt, blown up the vanity of princes, and sometimes prevailed with the subject to be not only passive in his obedience, but active in his compliance to their unjust commands; the former of which will never cease to be an indispensable duty, and the latter will always continue a damnable sin.

The sum and substance then of what has been said amounts to no more than this, that a false notion of power in superiors, backed with a tame and servile temper in dependents and inferiors, and a stretch of conscience in matters that are not dispensable with by the laws of God, has made princes aspiring in their demands; persuaded them to think too highly of themselves, and too contemptibly of others, and by the sole dint of their authority, to put a stamp upon truth itself, and force any doctrine to pass for current and orthodox. But,

Secondly, The next observation from the text is, that the method and artifice, by which great men think to prevail over mercenary souls, is the specious offer of preferment and honour.

Now the truth of this observation will appear from these three following considerations:

First, The prevalency of the offer itself.

Secondly, The agreeableness of it to human nature.

Thirdly, The condition of the person that offers it.

First, The offers of honour and preferment are very tempting and prevalent in themselves. The height of a station is apt to amuse the eye, and overturn the brain; and the kingdoms of this world, and the glories thereof, are ensnaring proposals to aspiring tempers. The favour of a prince, and the nod of a courtier; the greetings in the markets, and the pre-eminence at an entertainment; a distinction of quality, and the uppermost seats in the synagogues, have had a pernicious influence upon popular spirits, and made haughty and ambitious persons look with disdain and contempt upon all below them. The notion which Balak seems to have entertained of his power was, to bribe the conscience, and buy the curses of the prophet; and the same principle runs through other great men, and puts a fatal bias upon their creatures and dependents. Courtesy in superiors has effected strange things in some complaisant gentlemen, and bribes have been more potent and successful than armies. A seasonable gift has oftentimes stopped the mouth of a terrible adversary, and a goodly preferment brought down the stanchness of an orthodox divine. Honour is apt to dazzle our eyes and misguide our steps, to clear up our understandings and melt down our consciences; to infuse light into the heart and vigour into the hand; to pervert the will and bias our actions; to rectify the notions of good and evil, and refine upon the old-fashioned doctrines of our ancestors: in one word, it is apt to blunt our satire and disarm our fury; to overbear our arguments and silence our tongues; to open another scheme of Christian duties, and give a new, but surprising turn to the brain of a casuist. How strangely have some men been enlightened! how wonderfully have they grown wiser! how suddenly have they discarded their old principles! how shamefully shook hands with their dearest friends! and what is most of all surprising, their conversion has been in an instant, and their former scruples have vanished in a moment, and what was designed to harden them in their errors, has been the happy instrument of their conviction.

But notwithstanding all these specious pretences and designs, these flourishes and salves of a temporizing conscience, the world will be so ill-natured, as to miscall their

their zeal, and question their reformation; to see through the masks and disguises of designing men, and discover the secret hand behind the curtain, which so plausibly turns round the machine, so artificially changes the scenes. But,

Secondly, This offer of preferment was more likely to succeed, because it was agreeable to the ambitious desires of human nature. And here nobody can deny but that Balak's politics were regular, and the scheme well laid; the bait was plausible and inviting, and the prophet attacked on the right side: and though the event did not answer expectation, it was more owing to the interposition of Providence, and the awe of a superior power, than to the courage and inclination of Balaam: for if corrupted nature had been left to her own choice and conduct, what mortal could have kept his ground? what man could have been so brave and hardy as to cope with the united force of honour and interest? the conquest in this case was like to prove easy and delightful, and the charms of gold to be an over-match for the powers of magic.

There is a great degree of pride and ambition which is planted in the very root of our nature, and discovers itself in the most considerable actions of our life. The love of ourselves is generally at the bottom of our projects, and the prospect of honour gives life and spirit to the most hazardous undertakings: it cancels all former friendships, and supercedes obligations; it despises danger, and bears down opposition; breaks through the ties of nature, and overturns the principles of religion and conscience. But,

Thirdly, Honour and preferment may seem more tempting and valuable upon the account of the person that confers them. The ear of a prince is an uncommon favour, and an audience at court is not easily obtained. There are a great many difficulties that obstruct the passage, and it is usual to pass through abundance of tedious formalities and lingering application to make our addresses, or present a petition. Majesty is not to be approached at all times, nor state and grandeur laid aside to please the humour of every subject. Favourites, perhaps, may be heard, and fawning parasites caressed and rewarded; but men of uprightness and integrity are to be kept at a distance,

and persons that bear no character must not expect to appear before kings.

Since therefore the access to superiors is so difficult, and their favours are so rare and uncommon, it is no wonder that the worth of them is magnified, and the value augmented to an extravagant rate: for it is not always so much the greatness of the gift, as the quality of the person that gives it, which makes it acceptable to the receiver. A royal favour is the more to be esteemed because it is sought for with toil and obtained with difficulty. Were the purchase cheap, the benefit might be neglected, and the commonness of the blessing take off from the real value of it; but since it passes through so many hands, and is conferred from such an high station, it rises in proportion to the greatness of him that gives it, and so is more pleasing to the ambition and agreeable to the temper of him that receives it. But,

Thirdly, The common way to worldly grandeur is to study the tempers and conform to the principles of those who are in a condition to oblige you. If Balaam would have honour and promotion, he must act as Balak will have him, and curse the Israelites, or lose the blessing of the king. His conscience must be easy and complaisant, pliant and conformable, and all the powers in heaven must be engaged on his side whenever the humour of his prince requires it. Thus religion (though in itself pure and spiritual, and, like its divine Author, liable to no variableness or shadow of turning) is oftentimes born off from its native simplicity, and wrested and warped to secular purposes. It must be blended with art, and disguised by knavery; be allayed with superstition, and counterfeited by hypocrisy: it must be moulded and tempered to make it current and fashionable, and turned into ten thousand shapes to render it agreeable to different palates, and variety of ages; it must be glossed upon and interpreted at pleasure; be taught the language of courts, and be made subservient to the interest of princes: the rigours of it must be softened, and the penalties extenuated; the pretended excrescences pared off, and the substantial duties dissembled; the very life of it stifled, and only the shadow preserved. It must sooth the enthusiast, and caress the debauchee; pervert the learned, and

excuse the ignorant; comfort the drunkard, and indulge the libertine: it must be grimace to the humorist, and cruelty to the zealot; starchiness to the hypocrite, and craft to the villain; all things to all men, and every thing in fact but what it really is.

Thus is religion taught to differ and vary, as much as the very faces of its professors; and the same scheme of principles can no more suit with every age and humour, than the same garment fit every individual person in the world. It is no wonder then, that designing men are so apt to veer and tack about, and to prostitute their conscience upon every new turn of government, if we consider the principles of the court they are dependent upon, and the humours of those great persons they have expectation from. Though Naaman may proclaim the greatness of his cure, and magnify the power of that God who effected it, yet he cannot tell how to be a worshipper of him, unless he have a dispensation for *bowing in the house of Rimmon* (2 Kings, v. 18.); for his character at court must be kept up, and his post in the government secured; his devotions are to be cramped by a place, and his gratitude stifled by a stingy reserve for his master; and in this thing it is to be hoped that the Lord will pardon his servant, and not urge his duty to the prejudice of his interest; it is to be hoped the God of Israel will make some allowances for reasons of state, and the good of the public, and not too rigidly insist upon the conversion of a courtier or the piety of a soldier.

Neither was this Naaman's particular case only, but every age has produced instances of some men that would willingly serve their own turns by their pretensions to godliness, and every reign has furnished out some doctrines which the slaves to a court and the seekers after preferment have greedily sucked in, and zealously propagated. How often has law and divinity been canvassed, the statutes and the bible been ransacked, to give proof and credit to a doubtful title? How often have the heads of divines and the pens of critics been employed, to strike out some new and marvellous light from the intricate and mysterious visions of Ezekiel, and to sooth the ambition and justify the undertakings of

princes, by an odd and ridiculous comment upon the Revelations?

At other times all the distinctions of the schools must be sifted, to pick out reserves and salvoes for a temporizing conscience; and the pretensions of rulers must be pronounced just and honourable, both by the laws of God and man, whenever their humour or ambition leads them to enlarge their dominions, and encroach upon the rights of their innocent neighbours.

Thus when Ahab and Jehosaphat revived an old claim to Ramoth-Gilead, and combined to enter upon it by force of arms, *all the false prophets* declared that *they should go up against it, and prosper; for God would certainly deliver that important place into their hands.* (1 Kings, xxii. 12.) This was a comfortable determination of a weighty case, and these were casuists fit to be consulted by ambitious princes: and accordingly their words were immediately received as the oracles of God, and their persons had in the highest esteem and veneration.

When *Korah* and *his company* pleaded for the *holiness of the congregation*, (Numb. xvi.) and encouraged a mutiny against Moses and Aaron, they were presently carested as patriots of the people, and represented as men serviceable in their generation, and of the greatest character and renown in their country. Rebellion (it seems) had sanctified their persons, and their pretensions must of necessity be lawful, because they struck in with a faction, and were countenanced by the populace.

From hence we may gather, that it is not always right but humour, not religion but interest, that places a man at the head of a party, and gives him a character in this world. He that suits his discourse to the times, and prophesies smooth things; that daubs with untempered mortar, and calls good evil and evil good, shall certainly have the applauses of a corrupt and vicious age; but he that has regard only to the rules of truth, and does not nicely distinguish the persons of men, shall meet with abundance of coldness and indifferency: for it is observable, that every age has its peculiar and darling doctrines, and cannot endure the touching of some tender points, which are contrary to the approved

proved maxims of government and policy.

Ask thy fathers, and they will shew thee; enquire of the elders, and they will tell thee, (Deut. xxxii. 7.) to what an insupportable height the jurisdiction of St. Peter was advanced, and how crowns and sceptres were laid at the feet of his haughty successors; and then presently, upon a little disgust, the supremacy was transferred to the king, and all the passages to preferment stopped, unless you adored his majesty, and vilified his holiness.

In succeeding ages the prerogative was screwed up to the highest degree, and a *jus divinum* pleaded in behalf of monarchy and absolute government; and after that, liberty and property cast the balance to the republican side, and the natural right of free-born subjects was a specious colour for faction and rebellion.

Passive obedience and non-resistance have had their several rises and turns in the world; and the murdering of kings, and the binding of nobles in links of iron; the pillaging of estates, and the banishment of the legal owners, have been the doctrines of our Saviour, and the privileges of his saints. The story of the Maccabees, like a two-edged sword, has cut every way, and been pleaded for and against resistance; and the Theban legion has been either truth or fiction, as it has best suited with the humour of princes, and the interest of writers.

Lastly, Every one knows the time when divines have learnedly pressed the necessity of church communion, and set off the danger of schism and dissension with a becoming warmth and zeal; and then the tables have been turned on a sudden, and the same men have been all over peace and love, gentleness and forbearance: moderation has been in their mouths, and lukewarmness in their hearts; latitude in their principles, and indifference in their practice.

All these instances make it undeniably appear what variety of doctrines have been in vogue in this nation, and what shifting and turning there has been in the several parts of religion. It is not my business to determine which point, upon a just state of the question, may be right; but only to remark to you, that all these doctrines have had their rise and fall according to the humours and inclinations of men in authority; and the way to

worldly advancement has been to swim with the stream, and strike in with the fashionable principles of the times: so that the court, not the bible, has given instructions to the prophet; and the will of the prince, not the law of God, has been the rule of the subject's obedience. But,

Fourthly, As flattery and trimming have been the first steps to preferment, so plain-dealing and sincerity have been the usual bar and impediment against it. The chief reason why merit is so seldom dignified and distinguished, and men of goodness and piety are so often neglected, is, because a licentious age cannot bear the soundness of their doctrine, and the freedom of their reproofs.

If St. John the Baptist will urge the unlawfulness of Herod's marriage, he shall fall under the displeasure of a wanton Herodias, and in the end lose both his liberty and his life.

If St. Paul will discourse of justice and chastity before a lascivious and tyrannizing Felix, he shall be dismissed from the presence of the governor with a frown, and be rewarded with bonds and imprisonment for his impudence and presumption.

When Elijah reproved Ahab for his injustice and barbarity towards Naboth, and for *selling himself to work evil in the sight of the Lord*, (1 Kings, xxi. 20.) the freedom of the discourse was censured, and the man of God represented as an enemy to the government. Had he soothed and flattered Ahab in his vices, he should always have had a share of his affections, and been reputed his very good friend; but to accuse him with boldness, and rebuke him with authority, was too unmannerly a doctrine for a court, too plain and blunt a truth to go down with a king.

The like misfortunes happened to Micah, when he declared against the expedition into Ramoth-Gilead, and represented all *Israel scattered upon the hills as sheep wanting a shepherd* (xxii. 17.); for his prophecy was rejected, and his person ignominiously treated for telling the truth: Ahab positively declared *he hated him, because he did not prophesy good concerning him, but evil* (v. 8.); and, as a reward for his sauciness, commanded him *to be kept in prison, and fed with bread of affliction, and water of affliction, till he returned*

turned in peace. (1 Kings, xxi. 27.) Fetters and stripes, perhaps, might bring the man of God to a better mind, and oblige him to preach a more courtly and seasonable doctrine: for truth is of too plain and homely an aspect to be seen at all times; and those that would dwell in kings houses, must be distinguished by the smoothness of their speech as well as the softness of their raiment. Some persons are too big for reproof, and too wise for instruction; and when vice has once got the sway and ascendant of such minds, it grows head-strong and assuming, rebellious and untractable, and discharges its fury upon those who oppose the torrent, and are for stopping the growth of infidelity. If the preachers of righteousness will be faithful monitors, and speak truth boldly, there will never be wanting Ahabs to hate their persons, and Balaks to dishonour their function; their plain-dealing will disgust their rulers, and their principles put a stop to their preferment; and, *lo, the Lord hath kept them back from honour.*

Fifthly, Notwithstanding the allurements and temptations of this world, it is still the duty of a good man to act agreeably to his conscience and the laws of God. And here Balaam is so far a pattern for our actions, as he did not embrace the unreasonable proposals, and comply with the unjust demands of Balak. He boldly owned himself a servant to another master, and so much at the disposal of a superior power, that if the king would *give him his house full of silver and gold, he could not go beyond the word of the Lord his God, to do less or more.* (Numb. xxii. 18.) The answer was generous, and the resolution brave; the principle was rightly formed, and the example may be instructive to posterity: for every one that acts by a commission from God, as Balaam pretended to do, and is called in to give his advice in things pertaining to his function, must either dishonour his great Master and forfeit his own character, or be particularly remarkable for these following virtues:

First, Such an uprightness and sincerity of mind, as will secure him from any mean compliance with the demands, or any fulsome flattery to the persons, of those who have the rule over him.

Secondly, For such care and industry in all the concerns of that great Master,

whose he is, and whom he serves, as may prove him to be a true ambassador of Christ, and a faithful steward of the mysteries of God.

Thirdly, For such courage and resolution in enforcing the precepts of Christianity, and exacting obedience from all orders and degrees of men, as to shew him to have no other aim in view than the honour of his God and the salvation of his brethren.

He that is endued with these qualifications, and faithfully discharges his office in all these respects, is the very reverse of that fawning and temporizing sycophant whom I have so fully described in the foregoing discourse: and I have no farther occasion to enlarge upon this subject, or to make any other use of the three last observations, than to sum up the character of a good man in a word or two.

We may see then that he is a man of conscience, and not of interest; free from design, and unaccustomed to flattery; steady in his principles, and regular in his practice; devout in his life, and uniform in his actions. Though he is a stickler for government, and an example of obedience, he is no friend to the cabals or patron of the injustice of his governors. He neither robs his God to enrich his sovereign, or depresses his sovereign to exalt his subjects. He has no notion of the state in prejudice to the church, nor owes any secret service to his prince contrary to his public engagements and obligations to his God. The rule of his life is steady and unerring, and his conscience void of offence towards God and towards man. His pen is not mercenary, nor his lips perfidious; his head wavering, nor his heart deceitful. He never wrests the scripture from its genuine sense, nor perverts the text to his private interest; he makes no false comments upon St. Paul for the sake of a party, nor conceals any necessary truth in compliment to his superiors. He has courage to defend what was his duty to assert, and zeal to practise what was his principle to preach. He is not to be carried away with shadows, or amused with greatness; not to be won by a smile, or terrified by a frown; not to be moved with fair words, or bought off by real preferments.

Since then the character of this good man is so charming and delightful, and the

the virtues which compose it so rare and uncommon; since the temptations to vice are so prevalent, and the proposals of honour and preferment so engaging; since men of our profession are generally attacked from this quarter, and the tricks of state are carried on by the servile compliances of church-men; it will not be improper, at the close of this discourse, to fortify our minds against those baits and snares that are generally laid in our way, and to encourage one another in well-doing, from a prospect of that recompence of reward which a conscientious discharge of our duty will entitle us to: for by this means we shall convince our superiors that we look higher than the petty and trifling considerations of this world, and are not so mercenary in our tempers, and loose in our principles, as they may fancy us to be. We shall declare to all mankind that we do not study to be great at the expence of a good conscience, or use any indirect means to gain higher and more honourable stations than our neighbours; but that we endeavour to promote the common interest of the church and state, and to vindicate the honour of the priesthood; and instead of being broken into parties, and led away by crafty men, are willing to unite as brethren, are zealous to act as Christians.

Now for our greater encouragement in this work, we may, in the

Sixth and last place, consider, that comfort and satisfaction which a person, that acts impartially between the commands of his God and the dictates of his conscience, does in part find already, and shall more fully experience hereafter, though he misses those advantages which flatterers and temporizers may gain in this world: for if the performance of good actions fills men with joy and delight, certainly he shall have a more than ordinary share of it who has stood the trial in the most dangerous times, and opposed himself against the most violent temptations: for to withstand the overtures of interest and honour, and vanquish the perverse inclinations of intriguing men, argues no inferior degree of virtue, and entitles a man to no mean reward. As the enterprize was great, and the danger uncommon, so the wages shall be proportionable, and the end glorious.

If we look no farther than this world, I take the reflections of a man's mind

upon a well-spent life, and the assurances of a good conscience in general, to be a great encouragement to his actions, and no small comfort under his sufferings; and in the case before us, when any person has been employed in public concerns, and not been born off from his duty by any private interest, the reflection upon his past services must be more pleasing to himself, and the applauses of his conscience rapturous and transporting.

If perilous times should arise, and God in his anger should give up a rebellious and disobedient nation, what inward peace and satisfaction must those few good men have, who, like Moses, have stood in the gap, and endeavoured to stop the torrent of infidelity; who, by all suitable arguments, have opposed the modish and fashionable sins of the age, and not basely cringed and truckled to men in authority. Their present comfort and rejoicing is, that, in an honest simplicity and godly sincerity, they have had their conversation in this world, and not been carried away by prejudice and partiality, or influenced by the ill examples of great men; that they have advanced no principles destructive to the constitution, nor encouraged any practices offensive to God; that they have neither unhinged the government, or betrayed the church; neither flattered their superiors, or misled their brethren.

Whatsoever, therefore, shall be the fate of their native country, and whatever afflictions shall light upon the church, they have made a timely provision for themselves, and secured a treasure in another kingdom. As they have been famous for a bold and undaunted profession of their faith, and appeared openly in defence of Christ and his gospel before the kings and rulers of this world, so they shall be owned by their God and Saviour, and applauded by saints and angels, in another. The great Master whom they serve is both able and willing to promote them, and the reward of their service will infinitely compensate their diligence and fidelity: it is not subject to casualties, or encumbered with disadvantages; not to be sought for with flattery, or procured by bribery; but it is the effect of our courage and zeal, and the purchase of a pure and undefiled conscience.

Wherefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast and unmoveable in your holy profession; slight the deceitful overtures of this world, and embrace the more advantageous proposals of another: serve a Master who is truly honourable, and pursue your real interest by just and reputable means. Place your reversion in heaven against the troublesome and vexatious possessions on earth, and the certain favour of your God against the fickle humours of earthly potentates; oppose life and immortality to death and disgrace, and a bright and triumphant crown of glory to the fading and momentary honours of this world; and then you will come to a just notion of what is truly great and magnificent, and know where to make your addresses for substantial preferments. You will abhor the mean compliances and pity the mercenary tempers of some of your brethren. You will condemn the frowns of haughty men, and if kings should arise that know not Joseph, you will overlook the neglects of such an ungrateful court. You will carry your eye beyond the dazzling greatness of temporal honours, and your courage will be augmented, and your hopes enlivened by a glorious prospect of futurity. Amen.

SERMON CXXXIX.

A good Man supported by his Virtues.

PROV. xiv. 14.

A good man shall be satisfied from himself.

A DESIRE of ease is implanted in the very make and constitution of our souls, and the pursuit of happiness is the constant labour and employment of our lives. All our searches and enquiries are to find out methods to better our present condition, and all our care and solicitude is to redress the real or pretended evils of human life. Heaven and earth are ransacked for the seat of happiness, and contemplation is employed, and books are turned over, to discover the road to her mansion-house. Nature is consulted, and fortune caressed, to make us happy; antiquity is called in to our assistance, and the several plans of philosophy presented to our eyes. The most hazardous voyages are undertaken in quest of this valuable treasure, and the products of

remotest countries imported, to complete our felicity.

Yet, notwithstanding all this labour of the hand, and vexation of the spirit, the unfortunate sons of men are generally at a loss in their searches after happiness; and, like a traveller that mistakes his way when he first sets out on the road, the farther they advance, at the greater distance they keep from their journey's end; the faster they pursue, the faster the goddess flies from their embraces; and whilst they dream of enjoyment, and amuse themselves with an imaginary paradise, they are lulled in the arms of destruction, and ready to be swallowed up in the gulph of perdition.

Now the great occasion of all this misfortune is principally to be imputed to our own selves, and may be well reckoned the deplorable effect of our ignorance and sensuality. We fail of the attainment, because we do not use right measures in the pursuit of happiness; we miss the prey, because we are unskilful in the chase. Our appetites and affections are not duly regulated, nor our thoughts employed upon their proper objects. We are too easily diverted by trifles, and imposed upon with counterfeits; too frequently misled by phantoms, and dazzled with appearances; and we too greedily catch at shadows, and build on contingencies. Thus poor deluded man walks on in his own vanity, and disquiets himself in vain; courting happiness in ten thousand shapes, and yet stopped in his career, or baulked in his expectation every moment! Alas! our fancy is ungovernable, and our imagination too apt to rove; we carry our eye from ourselves, and view the bewitching prospect at a distance, whereas our curiosity should be restrained, and our searches confined to home. The most material discoveries are to be made from ourselves, and the seat of happiness is in a man's own breast. *Nemo potest non beatissimum esse, qui est totus aptus ex sese, quique in se uno sua ponit omnia.* (Tull.) The quieting of our passions and the government of our minds, the exercise of our reason, and the discharge of conscience, the practice of virtue and avoiding of vice, are the only evidences of present comfort, and the surest foundations for everlasting felicity.

A good man shall be satisfied from himself.

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In treating of these words, I shall confine myself to the following method:

First, To give some short account, and general character of a *good man*.

Secondly, To enlarge more particularly upon that internal satisfaction which arises to him from the contemplation of himself.

Thirdly, To point out some times and seasons when this contemplation of himself, or reflection upon a virtuous life, may be the greatest comfort and support to him.

First, I am to give you some short account and general character of a *good man*.

A *good man* is something which fills the mind with such a lovely idea, as makes every one fond of the appellation, and ambitious of the honour of it. A *good man* has born up his reputation in the worst of times, and maintained his character in despite of detraction. A *good man* has been the idol of the people, as well as the care of the public; the theme for the poet to flourish, as well as the orator to declaim upon. Every sect and profession in the world have been willing to appropriate this honourable badge to themselves, and have fancied there was some peculiar excellency in their own party which must give them the preference and superiority over others. But, alas! the virtues which constitute a *good man*, are no more to be confined to the parties and cabals of our times, than the heat of the sun to a corner of the world, or day and night to one climate.

The stoics, of all philosophers, have made the greatest pretences to the rigour and severity of virtue, and bestowed the highest encomiums upon their wise or good man. They have divested him of all passion to prove his alliance to the Deity, and in some cases given him the preference to the immortal gods. Seneca seems to run up the character of a *good man* to the same inimitable pitch that Tully does his complete orator: there is so much required to finish the one, as can never be obtained in this life; and so many virtues must unite in the other, as are no ways consistent with flesh and blood.

The scriptures (which make such frequent mention of a *good man*) have recommended better rules to attain to his excellencies, than any of the most elaborate

writings of the moralists ever could do: for though they do not set him off in all the wild panegyric, in all the mad and extravagant rants of the stoics, yet they ascribe to him as much as is proper for a mortal to receive, and give him the utmost advantage which is consistent with sobriety and reason. They place him indeed in a state of dependence, and make him subservient to his Almighty Sovereign; yet they furnish him with the best instructions to please his Maker here, and give him the assurance to be like him hereafter: and, forasmuch as the divine Nature is most conspicuous to this lower world in the works of mercy and providence, and does more effectually command our veneration, upon the account of his goodness and liberality, than any other of his astonishing and unsearchable attributes; we are to take the dimensions of a good man as he copies after the Deity, and to consider his virtues more as they relate to society, and are instrumental towards the promotion of piety and the well-government of the world, than as they consist in any intellectual perfections, any recluse or abstracted exercises of devotion.

Our blessed Saviour, in his most incomparable sermon on the Mount, directs us to universal love and charity, to candour and civility, to munificence and liberality, in order to be reputed the *children of our Father which is in heaven, who maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust.* (Matt. v. 45.)

Now, if we take our measures from this standard, and endeavour to characterize a *good man* in a word or two, we must say that he is an imitator of God, and a lover of his brethren, a distinguisher of the virtues of good men, and a friend to the persons of bad ones; free without distinction, and generous without pride; affable without design, and condescending without affectation; easy of access, and ready to communicate; merciful in his temper, and unbiassed in his favours; open in his heart, and liberal with his hand. If we consider him as a prince or a subject, as a parent or an husband, as a neighbour or a friend, as a magistrate or a private man, we shall find that one loving principle runs through his whole life, and gives spirit and activity to all his undertakings. His actions

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are not sullied by self-love, nor his projects cramped by a narrow genius. The good of the public engrosses his thoughts, and the providing for others employs his time. The law of God is the rule of his conscience, and the service of his country the glory of his life: his greatest care is to avoid offence, and his sole want is an object for his charity.

This is that *good man* whose praise is in this world, and whose reward in another; whose bounty is proclaimed by babes and sucklings, and whose name is written in the book of life. This is that *good man* for whom St. Paul tells us, *one would even dare to die*; whereas the righteous man can lay claim to no such favour, nor can common right and strict justice glory in the performance of such heroic friendship.

I shall detain this audience no longer upon this general subject than whilst I sum up the encomium, and give the finishing strokes to the character of a *good man*, in these lofty and pompous expressions of the Son of Sirach: *He lived peaceably in his habitation, and was honoured in his generation, and became the glory of the times. Whereas some there be, which have no memorial, who are perished as though they had never been, and are become as though they had never been born, and their children after them; there is still a good and a merciful man, whose righteousness shall never be forgotten. With his seed shall continually remain a good inheritance, and his children are within the covenant. His seed stands fast, and his children for his sake. His seed shall remain for ever, and his glory shall not be blotted out. His body shall be buried in peace, and his name liveth for evermore.* (Ecclus. xlv. 6, 7, 8. 10, 11, 12, 13, 14.)

Secondly, I come to enlarge more particularly upon that internal satisfaction which arises to a *good man* from the contemplation of *himself*: and this I shall endeavour to do,

First, By considering this satisfaction in its own nature.

Secondly, In exclusion of worldly things.

Thirdly, As it takes in a prospect of futurity.

First, If we would consider the satisfaction which a *good man* receives from *himself*, in its own real nature, I can define it to be nothing else but that comfort

and pleasure which redounds to a man, from the reflections of his mind upon a virtuous and religious course of life. This comfort and pleasure is what comes generally recommended to us under the character of a good conscience, upon the peace and tranquillity of which the scriptures bestow such frequent and lofty encomiums. I intimated to you before, that this satisfaction was the more visible effect of goodness and beneficence; but this does not hinder it from extending itself to all the instances of duty wherein a man stands bound to God, his neighbour, and himself.

When a man considers himself as a rational creature, and endued with all those abilities and qualifications which place him above the level of sublunary beings, and next in order to those immortal spirits which wait upon the throne of God; it can be no small satisfaction to him that he has maintained his post, and quitted himself like a man; that he has acted up to the dignity of human nature, and employed his several talents and graces according to the interest and design of the donor.

Again, When a man shall consider the obligations he lies under to his Maker, and the right which accrues to God over the works of his own hands, by virtue of creation, preservation, and redemption; he will find inexpressible satisfaction in making some returns to such a beneficent God, and recommending himself to the favour of the Almighty, by the exercise of faith and affiance, and by the acts of obedience and resignation.

Lastly, If a man considers himself as part of the universe, (as the emperor Marcus Antoninus commonly expresses it,) and not so much designed to carry on some secret intrigues of his own as born for the good of the public, and dedicated from the womb to the service of his brethren; how charmed and enamoured must he be with the very thoughts of discharging these relative duties faithfully, and acting uprightly in every respective capacity? With what holy indignation does he cast his eyes upon the troubles and devastations of this world, and look upon those haughty spirits who are hurried on with bitterness and rage, and always biting and devouring one another? who are perpetually engaged in broils and contentions, and seem

willing

willing to leave the reproachful monuments of their cruelty and revenge wherever they have gotten the upper hand. He is free from that disquietude and remorse which flows from such inhuman and barbarous actions; and his present satisfaction is, that he has loved all mankind more out of a principle of affinity than any prospect of gain, and upon all occasions respected their persons, and bore with their infirmities, solicited their cause, and promoted their interest, without the least favour or partiality.

These, my brethren, are the principal instances of our duty, upon the performances of which we look back with pleasure and delight, and are filled with such joy and rapture as can be only known to a devout soul, and is better felt than expressed.

O blessed Lord! *who knowest our down-sitting and uprising, and spiest out all our goings, do thou try our reins, and seek the ground of our heart: prove our integrity, and examine our thoughts: look well, if there be any way of wickedness in us, and lead us into the way everlasting.* (Ps. cxxxix. 23, 24.) Do thou enable us to survey ourselves, and to penetrate into the recesses of our consciences; to review our actions, and compare our spiritual performances; and from the assurances of a well-spent life to pronounce that comfortable sentence, *well done, good and faithful servant*, upon our souls. Keep us from those fears and anxieties which haunt and perplex the wicked; from those smitings, reproaches, and prickings of heart, which are the present lot of the sinner, and the dreadful earnest of ensuing vengeance. *Let every one prove his own work, and then shall he have rejoicing in himself alone.* (Gal. vi. 4.) *Conscientia bene actæ vitæ, multorumq; beneficiorum recordatio jucundissima est.* (Cicero.) The correspondence between the practice and the rule, and the conformity of the life of man to the laws of God, refreshes the spirits, and creates a perpetual harmony in the soul: the peace of conscience cheers the heart, and brightens the countenance; removes the clouds of despair from the brow, and dispels all melancholy vapours from the thought. *Great peace, O God, have those that love thy law, and nothing shall offend.* (Ps. cxix. 165.) Marvellous light springs up to the pure in mind, and spiritual re-

freshments descend upon the breasts of thy faithful servants.

Secondly, I am to consider a *good man's* internal happiness, exclusively of all outward things.

Aristotle has long ago thought fit to range the notion of advantage under the three heads, of mind, body, and fortune; and though he has given the preference to the former, and made it the principal ingredient of happiness, yet has he attributed something extraordinary and surprising to the two latter, and made them in a great measure accessory to, and in some sense compleitive of happiness.

This doctrine must be very well guarded, or else it will entrench upon the true Christian greatness, and take off from the honour and dignity of virtue: for if health and riches are any ways necessary towards the constitution of happiness, the consequence is unavoidable, that those who have the greatest affluence of these blessings are in the fairest probability to be happy: but the contrary to this assertion is so apparent, that we oftentimes see poverty and disgrace in actual possession of the prize, and some truly Christian virtues, (such as hope, affiance, and resignation,) which bid the fairest for happiness, to be only practicable in a low and abject state of life.

It must be allowed that condescension, liberality, and munificence, are supposed to be the attendants of an high fortune, and the sole accomplishments of the rich and the noble; but we shall find a vulgar error even in this assertion, if we consider that the fore-mentioned virtues do not so much consist in the management of the body, and the gift of the hand, as in the dispositions of the soul, and the willingness of the mind.

To bring this point to an issue:—We are to consider that the Christian law has placed all its professors in an equal capacity of happiness, and, in order to the attainment of it, has confined their desires to food and raiment, and commanded them to be content with what is barely necessary, without coveting superfluities. Nay, though the divine Wisdom should think it expedient sometimes to cut us short in this respect, and expose us to the hardships of hunger and nakedness; we have no reason to suppose our unfortunate circumstances any impediment to our virtue,

tue, but rather a furtherance of the same; because they throw us more entirely on the divine favour, and excite a more holy and vigorous affiance in that Almighty Being, whose sovereign will has the sole and absolute disposal of us. The advantage of wealth and the addition of respect are only so far instrumental towards the propagation of virtue, as they render the outward act the more remarkable, and make the circumstances of the agent beneficial to the community: but in reference to a man's self, good and evil are confined to the mind, and have no real communication with external advantages. The badge of distinction is fixed upon another place, and the honourable denomination is taken from the inward qualities. External blessings are but of small importance, neither is the largeness of the purse, or the strength of the constitution, any additional security to a mind truly seasoned with virtue and holiness. The weight of adversity can never bend down the soul, nor the walls of a prison inclose the freedom of thought. Casualties can be no surprise to an undaunted resolution; neither can poverty or scandal obscure the glories of virtue. *A good man* (says Seneca) "is happy within himself, and independent of fortune, and his virtue is to be seen through all oppositions." And lest this should seem too much like a stoical rant, the Son of Sirach has assured us to the same purpose, *That whether a man be rich or poor, if he have a good heart towards the Lord, he shall always rejoice with a cheerful countenance.* (Ecclus. xxvi. 4.)

Thus is a *good man*, in a Christian and divine, as well as a moral and philosophical acceptation of the phrase, truly *satisfied from himself*. But farther yet,

Thirdly, Christianity gives a *good man* more ample satisfaction from a prospect of a glorious futurity, which, being founded upon the immutable promise and veracity of God, is of equal validity and support to the soul as if it were actually present. St. Peter makes use of this very argument to comfort the primitive Christians under their persecutions, and tells them of *rejoicing greatly in the abundant mercy of God, who hath begotten us again unto a lively hope, by the resurrection of Jesus Christ; whom having not seen, we love: in whom, though now we see him not,*

yet believing, we rejoice with joy unspeakable, and full of glory. (1 Pet. i. 3. 8.)

Our Christian religion was designed to assist us in this valley of tears, and, by the certainty of an ensuing reward, to encourage the work assigned to us, to go on with pleasure. As we walk by faith, and not by sight, so we are comforted with a reverfionary bliss, and must make a future expectance overbalance a present calamity. The pious soul is always filled with rapture and extasy; and though she be doomed to flesh and blood, and forced to dwell with Melek, and to have her habitation among the tents of Kedar, yet she scorns the dirty acquaintance of this world, and maintains a society and conversation in heaven. She opens the window, and enlarges the prospect; carries her inquiries beyond the body, and takes her progress into another country; dwells upon the contemplations of eternity, and presents herself with some glimpses and anticipations of paradise. *O! then taste, and see how gracious the Lord is. Walk with him and rejoice, because your names are written in heaven.* (Luke, x. 20.) *Blessed is the people, O Lord, that can rejoice in thee; they shall walk in the light of thy countenance: their delight shall be daily in thy name, and in thy righteousness shall they make their boast. For thou art the glory of their strength, and in thy loving-kindness thou shalt lift up their horns.* Amen, (Ps. lxxxix. 16, 17, 18.)

SERMON CXL.

The same Subject continued.

PROV. xiv. 14.

A good man shall be satisfied from himself.

IN my former discourse I proposed to prosecute this assertion of Solomon, in the following order and method:

First, By giving you some short account and general character of a *good man*.

Secondly, By enlarging more particularly upon that internal satisfaction, which arises to him from the contemplation of *himself*.

Thirdly, By pointing out some times and seasons when this contemplation of himself, or reflection upon a virtuous life, may be the greatest comfort and support to him.

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I have already finished my short account and general character of a *good man*, and made such descants as I thought proper upon that internal satisfaction which arises to him from the contemplation of *himself*.

I shall now proceed, in the

Third place, to point out some times and seasons when this *good man's* contemplation of *himself*, or reflection upon a virtuous life, may be the greatest comfort and support to him.

Though virtue is such a friend and assistant as is always ready and at hand, and perpetually keeps the soul in a pleasant and cheerful posture, yet there are some occasions which will try her constancy; some seasons that demand her more than ordinary assistances. Upon such emergencies she is never backward or stinging, never dastardly or timorous; but exerts her vigour in proportion to the danger, and carries her votaries through the most amazing difficulties. When the clouds gather, and the storms arise, the pilot betakes himself to the helm, and steers his course with an even hand and by a steady compass. It may, therefore, perhaps, be worth our while to shift the scene for a moment, and to consider the sons of men as involved in some remarkable distresses, and to see how their virtue will comfort and relieve them under all.

First, It will comfort them under a public calamity.

Secondly, Under a private affliction.

Thirdly, Under a false accusation.

Fourthly, In the time of sickness.

Fifthly, At the hour of death.

Sixthly, In the day of judgment.

First, If we consider a *good man* in relation to the public, we shall find him best supported in all national calamities, and most effectually relieved from the insults of the common enemy, by the aids and assistances of his virtues.

In the destruction of kingdoms it is observable, that the fate of the inhabitants is promiscuous, and that there can be no particular distinction made between the treatment of good and bad men: but it is still remarkable that, either before these national judgments are brought upon a people, the wise Disposer of events has been frequently pleased to remove some select friends from approaching danger, or else to recommend them afterwards

to the mercy of their conquerors in a foreign land.

Of both these usages we have frequent instances in the scriptures, and are presented with such interpositions of Providence, in favour of God's saints and servants, as may enamour us with those principles, and make us emulous of those practices which have procured such miraculous protections and deliverances. We find Lot removed from the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, and the city Zoar preserved for a receptacle and asylum of that preacher of righteousness, and his rescued family. When Huldah had prophesied the fate of Jerusalem, we read that king Josiah was exempted from the common calamity by his tears and repentance, and was to be prevented by a friendly death from beholding the ravage of his dominions, and the slaughter of his subjects: *Because thine heart was tender, (saith the Lord God of Israel,) and thou didst humble thyself before God, when thou heardest his words against this place, and against the inhabitants thereof, and humbledst thyself before me, and didst rent thy clothes, and weep before me; I have even heard thee also, saith the Lord. Behold, I will gather thee to thy fathers, and thou shalt be gathered to thy grave in peace, neither shall thine eyes see all the evil that I will bring upon this place, and upon the inhabitants of the same.* (2 Chr. xxxiv. 27, 28.)

After this terrible judgment was completed, and the Jews were carried captive to Babylon, we find the merciful providence of God attending his faithful servants in exile, and the virtues of Daniel and his adherents distinguished and rewarded by the eastern monarchs, and the patience and piety of Ezra and Nehemiah finally crowned with a glorious restoration.

But however the case may happen in respect of particular providences, or supposing, at present, that a good man should be partaker with his brethren in any common or national calamities; yet, forasmuch as his virtues have made him a loyal subject and a faithful citizen, we shall find him under no concern for betraying a public trust, under no regret for being accessory to the ruin of his native country. In the height of wars and rumours of wars, and in the midst of the distress and perplexity of nations, when men's hearts fail them for fear, and for looking after

after those things which are coming on the earth (Luke, xxi. 25, 26.) ; a good man's fortitude is conspicuous, his expectations are enlarged, and his hopes extend to futurity. He has been wise to true and lasting purposes, and made a timely security of the better part ; so that his heart is invulnerable, his treasure is guarded, and no breach or inroad can be made upon his conscience, without his own consent and approbation. The peace of mind is not to be molested by sword and famine, and virtue is a treasure never to be injured by captivity. Of this we have several instances in the prophets and wise men of antiquity, whose faith and constancy followed them into exile, and supported them in a foreign land. Some of these illustrious persons I have mentioned before, and I shall beg leave to add to their number what Tully has recorded in praise of Marcus Regulus, (viz.) " That he could not so much
 " derogate from the virtues of such an
 " hero, as to think him disturbed, un-
 " happy, or miserable, in the midst of
 " the Carthaginian torture. For the
 " greatness of his soul was not to be
 " lessened by the exquisiteness of his
 " pain, neither did his gravity or fide-
 " lity, his constancy or his courage, suf-
 " fer any eclipse in his adversity : for
 " his mind being guarded by virtue could
 " not be subject to any outward af-
 " fault ; and though the body was in
 " durance, the soul still preserved her
 " native freedom."

Secondly, A good man's virtue relieves him under a private affliction.

By a private affliction, I mean any disaster which may befall a man in his single capacity or private station of life, such as the misfortune of his family, the impairing of his health, the diminution of his estate, or the loss of his good name. In most of these respects we find Job attacked, when his territories were ravaged by the Sabeans, and his servants slain with the edge of the sword ; when his houses and goods were demolished, and his sons and daughters buried in the ruins of them ; when messenger upon the heels of messenger brought him the fatal tidings, and every report was aggravated with some more astonishing and dismal circumstance : yet, for all this, the man of patience kept his temper and integrity, and made no other reply to the

dispensations of Providence, but, *Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither : the Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away ; blessed be the name of the Lord. In all this Job sinned not, nor charged God foolishly.* (Job, i. 21, 22.) In all this the perfect and upright man stood equally poised by his virtues, and did not lean either to the right hand or the left, by any angry remonstrances or womanish complaints.

Now against the like unfortunate accidents, the same succours and support are still administered to good men ; the same unspotted conscience and unshaken piety will cope with dangers and surmount distresses. Patience has armed a good man against crosses and disappointments, and resignation has disposed him for any changes or vicissitudes of fortune : affiance in Providence has sweetened the bitter cup of adversity, and faith in God's promises made even persecution and martyrdom to be embraced with joy and thanksgiving. O triumphant innocence ! O impregnable virtue ! Look but once more upon this suffering and afflicted hero ! See, see, how this *stedfast and unmoveable* man passes through the *valley of tears* with cheerfulness and intrepidity ; facing every storm with resolution, bearing every shock with wisdom, and improving every loss to advantage ! When the winds begin to rise, and the waves to roar ; when *fearfulness and trembling come upon the sinner, and an horrible dread overwhelms the guilty*, a good man can retire peaceably into his own breast, and find the greatest calm and serenity within himself. He is not pricked with the consciousness of any sinful misdemeanor, nor are his looks pallid, or his countenance disordered, by any secret rebukes from within. He has no aching of heart, or fore-bodings of conscience ; no dread of privacy, or fear of himself ; no resort to his bottle for ease, or refuge to company for protection.

Thirdly, A good man's virtue relieves him under a false accusation. This was never more remarkable than in the lives and actions of the primitive Christians, who, by the strength of their piety, bore up against the malice of Jew and Gentile ; and cleared themselves from the imputation of atheism and disloyalty to the government ; from being disturbers of the public peace and *setters forth of strange*

doctrines ;

doctrine; by a solemn appeal to the tribunal of their own conscience.

Whoever looks into the Apologies and other writings of the fathers, will find abundance of arguments to this purpose: but because these labours are not the subject of every one's meditation, I shall endeavour to clear up the point under debate, from an instance or two in St. Paul's life.

When this great apostle was accused at Jerusalem for riot and sedition, he tells his own countrymen and the Roman governor, that *he had lived in all good conscience before God until that day.* (Acts, xxiii. 1.)

When Tertullus renewed the same charge of tumult and heresy against him, he had recourse to the same topick for an answer: *Herein* (says he) *do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offence towards God and towards man.* (xxiv. 16.) This was an argument beyond denial, a proof too big for confutation; the best evidence to buoy up the courage of the prisoner, and the most lasting support under fetters and confinement. What unspeakable comfort must flow from a generous and undaunted appeal to the knowledge of the whole world, for the manner and course of our life? What extasy of rejoicing must arise from the testimony of our conscience, *that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, we have had our conversation in this world?* (1 Cor. i. 12.)

Then fret not thyself, O my soul, at the contrivances of evil-doers; nor be thou full of heaviness and disquieted within me, when false witnesses rise up against thee, and lay to thy charge things which thou knowest not. Let malice storm, and censure do her worst; let informations be lodged, and busy sycophants encouraged; do thou look higher than an idle story or an officious lie: do thou form a better interest, when envy would traduce and power crush thee: contract a more honourable relation, and secure a more lasting friendship, when thy father and thy mother forsake thee, and thy kindred and acquaintance would break off their correspondence, and betray the most sacred trusts, for some mercenary designs of their own.

Fourthly, The contemplation of a good

life is the best support in the time of sickness.

Although man be encompassed with infirmities, and hourly threatened with death, yet the attacks of sickness are an uncommon surprise, and the management of diseased persons is something peculiar and romantic. The neighbourhood is alarmed at the news, and all the family is put into hurry and confusion; the servants are officious, and the relations sad; physicians are consulted, and medicines applied: but the cure oftentimes begins at the wrong end, and the prescription can be of little efficacy to a guilty patient. *It is neither herb, nor mollifying plaister, that restoreth to health,* but the infusions of grace which strengthen the heart, and the power of *thy word, O Lord, which healeth all things.* (Wisd. xvi. 12.)

Happy is he who has placed his trust in this never-failing remedy! who has made his God his friend, and his conscience his physician!

I would not by these suggestions insinuate that man was to dwell upon miracles, or that religion should introduce such a stoical apathy, as to transform men into stones, or totally extinguish the sense of pain: but I am still confident that it teaches them the best arts of management under sickness, and instructs them in the true wisdom of patience to bear their lot with contentment and resignation. Human nature, both as to outward impressions and inward sensations, may be the same in good and bad men; but grace sweetens the dispositions and cools the passions of the one, whilst guilt adds a pungency and acuteness to pain, and is the greatest sting and terror of a disease in the other. View these two persons upon the bed of languishing, and see the difference of their conduct and deportment, according to the variety of their actions in their past life. The wicked man can neither look backward without remorse, nor forward without horror. All his wishes are for a recovery from sickness, and all his applications are for the stupifying of his conscience, or the removal of his bodily tortures. But a good man surmounts his disease by spiritual contemplations, balances his present pain by the comfortable reflections upon a virtuous life; and

and fences against futurity by the promises of God and the merits of his Redeemer. And this brings me, in the

Fifth place, to consider how the contemplation of a good life may be the best support to us at the hour of death.

Those are very excellent and seasonable petitions of our church, that the more the outward man decayeth, God would strengthen us so much the more continually with his grace and holy spirit in the inner man; and would not suffer us at our last hour, for any pain of death, to fall from him: that his almighty and over-ruling goodness would not permit the violence of a distemper, or the shocks of death, to loosen our hold, or break off our alliance with God. This scene, which is antecedent to our dissolution, is a very shocking and melancholy time indeed; full of hurry, anguish, astonishment, and confusion; the flesh being then in a particular manner weak, and the temptations, for any thing we know, very strong. The bare pain of dying may not be so much as the fearful looking-for of judgment, and the disposal of our better part in a future state. It is virtue only can charge through these dangers, and be the strongest security in our last minutes. If she has made provision against the time of need, and, by throwing in stores and magazines, fortified the inward man, the soul is in a ready posture of defence, and can maintain her ground in defiance of the enemy. Those accidental assistances which are administered to sick and depraved minds by the advice of their spiritual pastors, or the charitable prayers of the church, are not of themselves sufficient, without any previous dispositions, to carry a man through the fiery trial: *Like seed sown upon stony ground, for want of depth of earth, they are soon scorched up, and withered by the violent heat of the sun.* (Matt. iv. 5. 7.) When persecutions or afflictions arise, wavering and uncertain men are immediately offended: but when virtue has by a long exercise been cultivated and improved, rooted and habituated to the soul, her strength will be proportioned to any danger, and the succours of grace will come timely in to the assistances of weakened nature.

Sixthly and lastly, From sickness and death, let us pass to the resurrection and

the day of judgment: and here I must beg your patience, whilst I leave mortality behind me, and bring my good man in idea to that place where he will speedily appear in reality.

Lift up your heads, O ye gates, and be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors; and the King of glory shall come in. (Ps. xxiv. 7.) Who can view, without trembling, this solemn and majestic entrance? Who can bear the coming of his Judge in the clouds from the right hand of power, (Matt. xxvi. 64.) without calling upon the mountains to fall upon him, and the hills to cover him? (Luke, xxiii. 30.) Who!

—Coram, quem queritis, adsum.

Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright! for he, he only, has courage to sustain this terrible shock; he has strength for this last rencounter; he has virtues to secure the victory. There is nothing in judgment can be dismal to him, who has the best assurances and the most rational satisfaction from himself. When the trumpet shall sound, and the Judge appear; when the book of fate shall be opened, and the secrets of all hearts disclosed; then shall the righteous man stand in great boldness before the face of such as have afflicted him, and made no account of his labours. *When they see it they shall be troubled with terrible fear, and shall be amazed at the strangeness of his salvation, so far beyond all that they looked for.* (Wisdom, v. 1, 2.) *When they cast up the accounts of their own sins, they shall come with fear, and their own iniquities shall convince them to their face.* (v. 20.) But piety shall appear with a different aspect, and innocence provoke the strictest scrutiny and inspection. *Every one that doth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reprov'd. But he that doth truth, cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God.* (John, iii. 20, 21.)

Now, it is a future judgment must place things in a true light, and adjust the irregularities of this partial world; and then shall religion creep from her retirement, and private charity be proclaimed before men and angels: then shall modesty be emboldened, and humility exalted; faith shall triumph, and hope be swallowed up in fruition.

O happy man, enter into the joy of thy Lord, and dwell upon the contemplation of

of thy virtues to all eternity. We fools might have thy fasting in derision, and make thy devotion a proverb of reproach; but how groundless were our censures, and how ridiculous our raillery! *We fools accounted thy life madness, and thy end to be without honour: but how art thou numbered among the children of God, and thy lot is among the saints!* (Wisdom, v. 4, 5.) *For though the righteous be prevented with death, yet shall he be in rest* (iv. 7.): *for the memorial of virtue is immortal; because it is known with God and with men: when it is present, good men will take example at it; and when it is gone, they desire it: it weareth a crown, and triumpheth for ever, having gotten the victory, striving for undefiled rewards.* (v. 1, 2.)

O God, grant us such a measure of thy grace, as to pass the time of our sojourning here with fear, and to encounter the several shocks of sickness and death with patience and resignation; so that we may appear joyful at thy tribunal, and be distinguished amongst the number of thine elect in the kingdom of thy Son's glory. Amen.

Now to God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, be ascribed all majesty, might, and glory, now, and for ever. Amen.

SERMON CXLI.

By EZEKIEL HOPKINS,

Late Lord Bishop of London-derry in Ireland.

On the Vanity of the World.

ECCLESIASTES, i. 2.

Vanity of vanities, saith the preacher, vanity of vanities, all is vanity.

THE preacher here mentioned, is no less a person than Solomon: and this whole book is no other than his recantation sermon. The text he preached on is the same that I have chosen; and it contains the true and severe judgment he passed upon all things under the sun. Certainly, he who had *riches as plentiful as the stones of the street*, (1 Kings, viii. 27.) and *wisdom as large as the sand of the sea*, (iv. 29.) could want no advantages, either to try experiments, or draw conclusions from them: and yet, when he had (Ecclef. i. 16, 17.) employed both in the

critical search of true happiness and contentment, and had dissected and ransacked the whole world to find it, he returns disappointed of his hopes, and tired with his pursuit, and begins the sad narrative of his long wanderings and errors with *vanity of vanities, all is vanity.*

1. The whole verse is loaden with emphases: and it is first observable, that he doth not glide into it by any smooth connexion of sense or sentences, but on a sudden breaks upon us, with a surprising abruptness, *vanity of vanities*: which shews a mind so full of matter, that it could not attend the circumstance of a prologue to usher it in.

2. Again: It is all expressed in the abstract. It sufficed not to censure all things to be vain, but they are *vanity* itself.

3. And this abstract hath another heaped upon it, *vanity of vanities*. Now this reflection of the same word upon itself, is always used to signify the height and greatness of the thing expressed, as *King of kings, and Lord of lords*, denotes the highest King and the most absolute Lord. So here, *vanity of vanities* intimates to us the most exceeding superlative vanity imaginable.

4. Again: This is not only once pronounced, but doubled and repeated; partly the more to confirm this truth to our belief; and thus Pharaoh's dream was doubled (Gen. iv. 32.): and partly the more to imprint it upon our consideration—*Vanity of vanities, vanity of vanities, all is vanity.*

But though this be expressed in most general and comprehensive terms, yet it must not be taken in the utmost latitude, as if there were nothing at all of solid and real good extant. It is enough if we understand the words in a sense restrained to the subject matter whereof he here treats: for the Wise Man himself exempts the *fear and service of God*, (Ecclef. xii. 13.) from that vanity under which he had concluded all other things. God and religion have in them a solid and substantial good, the one as our utmost end and happiness, the other as the best proportioned means to attain it.

When therefore he pronounceth all to be vanity, it must be meant of all worldly and earthly things, for he speaks only of these: and if we inquire what these worldly things are that have this censure of vanity so vehemently past upon them

them, St. John hath drawn up a full and true inventory of all the goods that are to be found in this great house of the universe: *All that is in the world, is the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life.* (1 John, ii. 16.) *The lusts of the flesh* are the pleasures of the world, which are all of them suited to gratify the sensual and fleshly part of man: *the lusts of the eye* are riches; so called, because their greatest serviceableness is only to make a glittering and dazzling show: which sense Solomon approves: *What good is there to the owners thereof, save the beholding them with their eyes?* (Ecclef. v. 11.) *The pride of life* is honour and dignity, that flatulent and airy notion that puffs up men's pride and vain-glory, and makes them look upon their inferiors as though they were not their fellow creatures. This is all that the world can shew, pleasures, riches, honours; and this is that *all* concerning which the Wise Man pronounceth that it is *vanity*.

For these things, though they make a fair and gaudy show, yet it is all but show and appearance. As bubbles blown into the air will represent great variety of orient and glittering colours, not (as some suppose) that there are any such really there, but only they appear so to us, through a false reflexion of light cast upon them: so truly this world, this earth on which we live, is nothing else but a great bubble blown up by the breath of God in the midst of the air where it now hangs. It sparkles with ten thousand glories, not that they are so in themselves, but only they seem so to us through the false light by which we look upon them; if we come to grasp it, like a thin film it breaks, and leaves nothing but wind and disappointment in our hands; as histories report of the fruits that grow near the Dead Sea, where once Sodom and Gomorrah stood, they appear very fair and beautiful to the eye, but if they be crushed, turn straight to smoke and ashes.

The subject which I have propounded to discourse of, is, the vanity of this world, and of all things here below; that being hereof convinced, we may desist our vain pursuit of vain objects, and may set our affections on those things which are above, which are the alone valuable, because the only permanent and stable good. Whence

is it that we are become so degenerate, that we, who have immortal and heaven-born souls, should stake them down to these perishing enjoyments? Whence is it, that we, who should soar aloft unto God, and were to that end fitted with the fleet wings of meditation and affections, to cut through the heavens in an instant, and to appear there before the throne of the great God, that we should lie here groveling in the thick clay and muck of this world, as if the serpent's curse were become ours, *to creep upon our bellies, and to lick up the dust of the earth?* (Gen. iii. 14.) Do we not shamefully degrade ourselves, when we stoop to admire what is so vastly below us, and barter away our precious souls, souls more worth than ten thousand worlds, only to gain some small part of one? Certainly the God of this world hath blinded men's eyes, and cast a strange mist before them, that they cannot discern what is most evident and obvious, even the instability and vanity of all sublunary enjoyments. That I may therefore contribute somewhat to scatter this mist, I shall endeavour to represent to you the native and genuine vanity that is in all earthly things, free from that deceitful varnish which the devil usually puts upon them; and so to deform and wound that great forcerer, that his charms may have no more power to prevail over you.

Now, that we may rightly proceed in this, I shall premise these two or three things:

I. First, There is nothing in the world vain in respect of its natural being. Whatsoever God hath made, is, in its kind, good; and so the great Creator pronounced of them when he took a survey of all the works of his hands: *God saw every thing that he had made, and behold it was very good.* (Gen. i. 31.) There is a most harmonious order and beauty in all the creation, and every part of it: and therefore Solomon must not be here so interpreted, as if he disparaged the works of God, in pronouncing them all vanity. Certainly he doth not libel his Creator, nor upbraid him, as though he had filled the world only with vain toys and trifles. If we regard the wonderful artifice and wisdom that shines forth in the frame of nature, we cannot have so unworthy a thought either of the world itself, or of God who made it.

View

View the sun (next unto God) the great *Father of lights* (Jam. i. 17.); view the numerous assembly of the stars; observe their influences, their courses, and measures. Is it a vain or impertinent thing to spread forth the heavens, and to beat out a path for every one of these to walk in? The air, that thin and subtile veil that God hath spread over the face of nature; the earth, that God hath poised in the midst of the air, and the whole universe in the midst of a vast and boundless nothing; the great sea, whose proud waves God binds in with a girdle of sand, and checks its rage by a body almost as unsettled and rolling as itself; the various kinds of creatures that God governs by a wonderful economy; the great family of brute beasts, which God brings up and educates without disorder; but especially man, the lord and chief of the world, that knot that God hath tied between heaven and earth, that sacred band of time with eternity; if we consider the frame and composure of all these things in themselves, or their usefulness and subserviency unto us, we shall be so far from branding them with vanity, that unless our contemplations lead us from natural things to the great God who formed them, we might rather fear lest their beauty and excellency should inveigle us, as it did the heathen, to look no farther for a deity, but worship them as gods.

II. Secondly, There is nothing vain in respect of God the Creator. He makes his ends out of all, for they all glorify him according to their several ranks and orders, and to rational and considerate men are most evident demonstrations of his infinite being, wisdom, and power: in which sense the apostle tells us, *The invisible things of God are clearly seen, being understood by the things which are made, even his eternal power and godhead.* (Rom. i. 20.) God hath composed two books, by the diligent study of which we may attain to the knowledge of himself; the book of the creatures and the book of the scriptures: the book of the creatures is written in those great letters of heaven and earth, the air and sea, and by these we may spell out somewhat of God. He made them for our instruction as well as for our service; the least and vilest of them read us lectures of his glorious attributes; nor is it any absurdity to

say, that as they are all the words of his mouth, so they are all the works of his hand. Indeed, this knowledge that the creatures give us of the Creator cannot suffice to make us happy, though it may be sufficient to make us inexcusable. (Rom. i. 20, 21.) We could never have collected from them those mysterious discoveries of God which the scriptures exhibit, and which are so necessary to our eternal bliss: for what signature is there stamped upon any of the creatures of a Trinity in Unity; of the eternal generation, or temporal incarnation of the Son of God? what creature could have informed us of our first fall, and guilt contracted by it? or where can we find the copy of the covenant of works or of grace printed upon any of the creatures? All the great sages of the world, though they were nature's secretaries, and ransacked its abstrusest secrets, yet all their learning and knowledge could never discover that sacred mystery of a crucified Saviour. These are truths which nature and reason are so far from finding out, that they can scarce receive them when discovered (1 Cor. ii. 14.): and therefore God hath manifested them to us by the light and revelation of the holy scriptures: but yet so much of God as belongs to those two great titles of Creator and Governor of the world, our reason may collect from created and visible things, running up their consequences till they are all resolved into the first cause and origin of all.

Thirdly, Therefore, all the vanity that is in worldly things, is only in respect of the sin and folly of man; for those things are said to be vain, which neither do nor can perform what we expect from them. Our great expectation is happiness, and our great folly is that we think to obtain it by the enjoyments of this world. This makes men pursue pleasures, hoard up riches, court honours and preferments, because they look with an over-weening conceit on these things, as such as can make them truly happy: whereas, to seek for happiness among these worldly things, is but to seek the living among the dead; yea, it is but to search for happiness among those things which are the very root and occasion of all our misery. They are all of them leaky and broken cisterns, and cannot hold this living water. This is it which makes them

charged with vanity, because, in our perverted fancy, we look upon them as stable, permanent, and satisfactory, fix them as our journey's end, which ought only to be used by us in our passage, and expect much more from them than they can yield; and so indeed the vanity is not so much theirs as ours.

There are some things (as St. Austin and the schools from him do well distinguish) which must be only enjoyed, other things that must be only used. To enjoy, is to cleave to an object by love for its own sake; and this belongs only to God. What we use, we refer to the obtaining of what we desire to enjoy; and this belongs to the creatures. So that we ought to use the creatures that we may arrive at the Creator: we may serve ourselves of them, but we must alone enjoy him.

Now that which makes the whole world become vanity, is when we break this order of use and fruition; when we set up any particular created good as our end and happiness, which ought only to be used as a means to attain it. All things in the world are in themselves good; but when we propound them as the greatest and highest good that we expect satisfaction from, this turns them all into vanity; and so every thing besides God becomes nothing.

And thus we have a brief account whence proceeds this vanity of the world, not from the nature of things, but from those vain hopes and expectations we build upon them, for that happiness which they cannot afford.

It remains therefore to display before you this vanity of the world, in some more remarkable particulars; whereof take these following instances:

I. First, The vanity of the world appears in this, that all its glory and splendor depends merely upon opinion and fancy. It is not so much what things are, as what we account them, that makes them good or evil: and what can be vainer than that which borrows its worth from so vain and fickle a thing as our estimation? and therefore we find the things of the world rated diversely, according to the esteem that men have of them. What were gold and silver, had not men's fancy stamped upon them an excellency far beyond their natural usefulness? This great idol of the world was of

no value among those barbarous nations where abundance made it vile: they preferred glass and beads before it, and made that their treasure which we make our scorn; they despise our riches, and we theirs: and true reason will tell us, that both the one and the other are in themselves alike despicable; and it is only fancy that puts such an immodest and extravagant price upon them, far above their natural worth. Should the whole world conspire together to depose gold and silver from that sovereignty they have usurped over us, they might for ever lie hid in the bowels of the earth, ere their true usefulness would entice any to the pains and hazard of digging them out into the light. Indeed the whole use of what we so much doat upon, is merely fantastical; and to make ourselves needy, we have invented an artificial kind of riches, which are no more necessary to the service of sober nature than jewels and bracelets were to that plane-tree which Xerxes so ridiculously adorned. And although we eagerly pursue these things, and count ourselves poor and indigent without them; yet possibly right reason will dictate, that they are no more needful to us, than to brute or senseless creatures; and that it would be altogether as ridiculous for a man to be decked with them, as for a beast or plant, were it but as uncommon. These precious trifles, when they are hung about us, make no more either to the warmth or defence of the body, than if they were hung upon a tree they could make its leaves more verdant, or its shade more refreshing. Doth any man lie the softer, because his bed-posts are gilt? doth his meat and drink relish the better, because served up in gold? is his house more convenient, because better carved or painted? or are his clothes more fit, because more fashionable than another's? And if they are not necessary to these natural uses, all that is left them is but fancy and opinion. Indeed, mankind cozen themselves by compact; and by setting a value upon things that are rare, have made many think themselves poor; whereas God and nature made all equally wealthy, had they not artificially impoverished themselves. It is nothing but conceit that makes the difference between the richest and the meanest, if both enjoy necessities: for what are all their superfluous riches but a load that men's covetousness

retousness lays upon them? They are but like Roman slaves that were wont to carry heavy burthens of bread upon their backs, whereof others eat as large a share as they: whatsoever is more than barely to satisfy the cravings of nature, is of no other use but only to look upon. (Eccles. v. 11.) Thy lands, thy houses, and fair estate, are but pictures of things: the poorest that sees them, enjoys as much of them as thyself: yea, and if men could be contented with reason, all that they behold with their eyes is as much theirs as it is the owners.

And indeed if we strip all these admired nothings to their naked principles, we shall find them as base and fordid as the meanest of those things which we spurn and despise; only art or nature put new shapes upon them, and fancy a price upon those shapes. What are gold and silver, but diversified earth, hard and shining clay? The very place where they are bred, the entrails of the earth, upbraids us for accounting them precious. The best and richest perfumes, what are they but the clammy sweat of trees, or the mucous froth of beasts? The softest silks are but the excrement of a vile worm. The most racy and generous wines are nothing else but puddle-water strained through a vine. Our choicest delicacies are but dirt, cooked and served up to us in various forms. The very same things which we condemn under one shape we admire in another; and with this, fancy and custom have conspired together to cheat us.

Think, O worldling! when thou castest thy greedy eyes upon thy riches, think, here are bags that only fancy hath filled with treasure, which else were filled with dirt. Here are trifles that only fancy hath called jewels, which else were no better than common pebbles. And shall I lay the foundation of my content and happiness upon a fancy, a thing more light and wavering than the very air?

Nay, consider, that a distempered fancy can easily alter a man's condition, and put what shape it pleaseth upon it. If a black and sullen melancholy seizeth the spirits, it will make him complain of poverty in the midst of his abundance; of pain and sickness, in the midst of his health and strength. It is true these are but the effects of a distorted fancy; but though his sickness and poverty be not real, yet the torment of them is. It is

all one, as to our disquiet, whether we be indeed unhappy, or only imagine ourselves so.

Again: If the fancy be more merrily perverted, straight they are nothing less than kings or emperors in their own conceit: a straw is as majestic as a sceptre; they will speak of their rags as magnificently as if they were robes; and look upon all that come near them as their subjects or servants. They make every stone a gem, every cottage a palace; all they see is their own, and all their own is most excellent. Now what think you, are these things vain or no? I doubt not but you will conclude them most extremely vain; and yet they serve their turns as well, and bring them in as much solace and contentment, as if they were really what they imagine them. Thus, Thrasyllus noted down all the ships that arrived at the port of Athens, thinking them and their merchandize to be all his own; and, when cured of that pleasant madness, confessed that he never in his whole life enjoyed so much content as in that conceited wealth those ships brought him. And indeed, for my part, I know not whether these things are more vain in the fancy or in the reality. Such is the exceeding vanity of all things in the world, that were it not for the eternal concerns of the soul, which cannot be so well regarded under a suspension or distraction of reason, I should make no difficulty to account and prove them the happiest men on earth.

If then there be so great a power in fancy, how vain must all those things be which you pursue with eagerness and impatience, since a vain fancy without them can give you as much satisfaction as if you enjoyed them all? And a vain fancy can, on the other hand, in the greatest abundance of them, make your lives as wearisome and vexatious as if you enjoyed nothing. That is the first demonstration.

II. Secondly, The vanity of the world appears in its deceitfulness and treachery. It is not only vanity, but a lying vanity, and betrays both our hopes and our souls.

I. It betrays our hopes, and leaves us nothing but disappointment when it promiseth satisfaction and happiness. What strange confidences do we build upon the false flatteries of the world?

In our prosperity we sing a requiem to ourselves, and are ready to say, *Our mountain is so strong, that it shall never be moved.* (Psal. xxx. 6, 7.) But within a while, God hath shaken it, like that of Sinai, and wrapped it about with clouds and thick darkness.

2. It betrays the soul to guilt and eternal condemnation: for usually the world entangles it in strong though secret and insensible snares, and insinuates into the heart that love of itself which is inconsistent with the love of God. The world is the devil's factor, and drives on the designs of hell. The apostle hath told us, *They that will be rich, fall into temptation and a snare, and many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition.* (1 Tim. vi. 9.) And because of the subserviency of worldly enjoyments to men's lusts, it is almost as impossible a thing to moderate our affections towards them, or to bound our appetites and desires, as it is to assuage the thirst of a dropsey by drinking, or to keep that fire from encreasing into which we are still casting new fuel: and therefore our Saviour hath pronounced it as *hard for a rich man to enter into heaven, as for a camel to go through the eye of a needle.* (Luke, xviii. 25.)

As Judas gave a sign to the officers that came with him to apprehend Jesus, *Whomsoever I shall kiss, the same is he, hold him fast* (Mat. xxvi. 48.), the same sign doth the world give the devil: whomsoever I shall caress and favour, whomsoever I shall heap honour and riches on, whomsoever I shall embrace and kiss, the same is he, hold him fast. Such a darling of the world is too often fast bound in the silken bands of voluptuousness, and consigned over to be fast bound in chains of massy darkness.

III. As all things in the world are lying vanities, so are they all vexatious. They are infamous to a proverb, uncertain comforts, but most certain crosses.

And therefore the Wise Man concludes them all to be, not only *vanity*, but *vexation of spirit*.

There is a four-fold vexatiousness in all worldly things.

1. There is a great deal of turmoil and trouble in getting them; nothing can be acquired without it. The sweat of Adam's brows hath streamed down along upon ours, and the curse together with it,

that in sorrow we should eat of that which toil and labour hath provided for us. (Gen. iii. 19.) Men rise early, and go to bed late, and eat the bread of carefulness; and such is either their curse or their folly, that they make their lives uncomfortable only to get the comforts of life.

2. Whether they get them or no, yet still they are disappointed in their hopes. If they cannot compass their designs, then they are tormented, because they fall short of what they laboured for; if they do compass them, yet still they are tormented, because what they laboured for falls short of what they expected from it. The truth is, the world is much better in show than substance; and those very things we admire before we enjoy them, yet afterward we find much less in them than we expected. As he that sees a falling star shoot through the air, and draw after it a long train of light, runs to the place, and thinking to get some bright and glittering thing, catches up nothing but a filthy jelly; such is the disappointment we find in our pursuit after the enjoyments of this world: they make a glorious show at a distance, but when we come near them, we find our hopes deluded, and nothing upon the place but a vile slime.

3. Thirdly, They are all vexation while we enjoy them. Be it what it will that we possess of the world, it is but by fits at most that we take any great pleasure in it; and then, what between cares and designs to secure the continuance of it, and fears of losing it, the comfort of enjoying it is wholly swallowed up: for strong affections begetting strong fears, do always lessen the delight of present enjoyments. This is the unhappiness of all things in the world, that if we set any price and value upon them, we lose much of the sweetness of them by fearing to lose them.

4. Fourthly, They are all vexatious, as in their enjoyment, so especially in their loss. Whatever we set our hearts upon, we may assure ourselves, and experience will teach it us, that the pleasure of possessing it will not near countervail the bitterness of losing it. And as if God had on purpose so ordained it, to take off our hearts from the world, the better we esteem any thing, the more vanity and vexation shall we find in it; for the

more

more will our care and perplexity in keeping it, and the more our grief and torment in losing it, be increased. That is a third demonstration.

IV. Fourthly, The vanity of the world appears in this, that a little cross will embitter great comforts. One dead fly is enough to corrupt a whole box of the world's most fragrant ointment. How much will only the aching of a tooth, a fit of the stone or gout, deaden and dishearten us to all the joys and pleasures of life? Certainly, the world must needs be vain, that cannot bear out the brunt of a little pain or sickness. The least cross accident is enough to discompose all our delights. And indeed there are so many ingredients required to make up worldly felicity, riches, health, friends, honour, good name, and the like; that if any of these be wanting, the whole composition is spoiled, and we shall take advantage against ourselves to conclude we are miserable: for such is the peevishness of our nature, that if we have not all we would, we take no content in any thing we have. And besides, we are apt to slide off from the smoother part of our lives, as flies from glass, and to stick only on the rougher passages: for neither is sense capable to be so much or so long affected with the impressions of pleasure as of pain, (since never could there yet be any delights invented as piercing as there are many torments,) nor yet is our busy remembrance so officious in calling back the pleasant passages of our days to our review, as those that have been more gloomy and dolorous. And though it be our sin to look more upon the crosses we find than the comforts we enjoy; yet here we may likewise see how vain a thing it is for us to expect happiness and contentment from the world, whose crosses, as they are more, so they are more considerable than its comforts.

V. Fifthly, Consider the longer we enjoy any worldly thing, the more flat and insipid doth it grow: we are soon at the bottom, and find nothing but dregs there. In all the pleasures of life, either our spirits sink and fall under the continuance of them, as not able to bear a constant tension and emotion; or the delight consists merely in the novelty and variety of the objects, which, when we are made more familiar with, are but

dull, because ordinary: and so they either tire our appetites, or deceive our hopes. And therefore the most artificial voluptuaries have always allowed themselves an intermission in their pleasures to recruit nature, and sharpen their sensual desires, without which they would but cloy and surfeit, and instead of pleasures, prove only a waste and oppression to the spirits. Epicurus himself, the great master and servant of pleasure, who made it the highest good and chiefest happiness of man, set himself certain days of abstinence in course, wherein he would but niggardly satisfy his stomach, well knowing that the pleasure of gluttony could never be so much enhanced as by an interval of hunger.

For what is a furnished table to him, whose constant meals overtake one another, but only the heaping of food upon crudities and indigestion? What the titles of honour to a person born noble? They signify no more to him than it doth to another man when he hears himself called by his ordinary name. What is respect and honour to a man long accustomed to it? It brings him no great content when he hath it, but torments him when he fails of it. Give these things to those that are unacquainted with them, if you would have them valued. Bring a poor man to a table of delicacies; invest an ignoble person with honours and dignities; give respect to a despised person, and for the present you bless them. But time and custom will wear off this content; and the tediousness even of such a life as this, will make them willing, at least for their divertisement and recreation, to retire to their homely cells and station: for as it is with those that are accustomed to strong perfumes, they themselves cannot scent those odours which to others that use them not are most sweet and fragrant; so it fares with us in the long continuance of worldly enjoyments; our senses are so stuffed and even suffocated with them, that we cannot perceive them; and unless we purchase pleasures by alternate sorrow, they are but lost upon us. Now how vain must the world needs be, whose comforts are not valuable while we have them, but while we have them not? and how vain are those joys for which we must pay down as much grief as the joys themselves are worth? So that, upon balancing the

account, there remains nothing to us; and it had been altogether as good to have enjoyed nothing.

Again, Consider, all the pleasure of the world is nothing else but a tedious repetition of the same things. Our life consists in a round of actions; and what can be duller than still to be doing the same things over and over again? Ask the most frolic gallant, whose only study it is how he may pass his time merrily, and live happily; what account can he give of his pleasures, but that, from his bed he riseth to his table, from his table to his sports, from them he tumbles into his bed again? This is the most genteel and fashionable life. And are these the great joys that a world so prized and so admired can afford? One half of his pleasant life he spends in sleep, a dull state, which we may rather reckon to death than life: the other half he spends in clogging his appetite, and tiring his body, and then to sleep again. What generous and noble designs are these! fit for high spirits and high births? while the contemptible peasants are left to do the drudgery of the world, and to be the only serviceable men in it. Nay, rather what a pitiful circle is this, still to be doing the same things, and things which we have before searched, and often found all that is in them? So that even a heathen could say, that not only a valiant or a miserable man might desire to die, but a nice and delicate man, as disdaining the irksome repetition of the same things.

VII. Seventhly, The vanity of the world appears in this, that it can stand us in no stead then when we have the greatest need of support and comfort. There be two seasons especially in which the soul wants relief and comfort; and they are, in trouble of conscience, and at the hour of death. Now in each of these the world shews itself to be exceeding vain and useless.

1. First, The world appears to be vain when we are under trouble of conscience. What choice comforts the soul then stands in need of, those who have felt the sting and terrors of it can best tell. The torments they then feel, next to those of the damned, are the most intolerable, and the most unutterable. God sets them up as his mark, and shoots his arrows, dipt in flaming poison, into the very midst of their souls. He kindles a se-

cret fire in them that consumes their bones, dries up their marrow, and scorches their entrails; and such is the spreading rage of it, that oftentimes it smokes out at their mouths in despairing outcries.

The spirit of a man (saith Solomon, Prov. xviii. 14.) *will bear his infirmity*; i. e. the natural cheerfulness and vivacity of a man's spirit will enable him to bear up under bodily pains; *but a wounded spirit who can bear?* When our prop itself is broken, we must needs sink and fall under the most gloomy apprehensions that guilt and hell can create in a soul already singled with those eternal flames into which with unspeakable horror it daily expects to be plunged. O! think what exact torture thou must needs endure, when God shall make deep wounds in thy spirit, and let fall great drops of his burning wrath on that part of thy soul that is infinitely more tender and sensible than the apple of thine eye. Imagine what sharp and intolerable pains those martyrs sustained, who (as the apostle tells us, Heb. xi. 37.) *were sawn asunder*. Or suppose that thou thyself wert now under the ragged teeth of a saw, drawn to and fro upon the tenderest parts of thy body, tearing thy flesh, thy nerves, and sinews, grating and jarring upon thy very bones; yet all the extremity of this is nothing to what torments the conscience feels when God causeth his sword to enter into it to rive it up; when he makes deep and bloody wounds in it, and instead of pouring in healing balm, with an heavy hand chafes them with fire and brimstone.

Now in such a time of anguish and distress as this, what is there that can relieve the afflicted soul? The worldling that heaps up his ill-gotten treasures, and wallows in thick clay, when God comes to ransack his conscience, and to set before him the guilt of his sins, will then know with terror and amazement, that there is a justice which gold and silver cannot bribe. The voluptuous person will no longer relish any favouriness in his carnal delights, when once *God writes bitter things against him*. (Job, xiii. 26.) What is mirth and music to him that can now hear nothing but the screeches of his own conscience? What is a full cup to him that can now taste nothing but the cup of fury and trembling? Little content will the noble take in his honourable titles,

titles, if all this while his conscience call him reprobate. A title of honour will no more abate the torments of conscience, than it doth mitigate Belzebub's torments to be stiled prince of the devils. All the world's honey will not serve to allay the envenomed stings of conscience. That is a fiery serpent, a deaf adder, that will not be charmed by all the alluring pleasures of the world. These are vain and impertinent to one whose thoughts are wholly possessed with the fear of wrath and hell, from which these cannot deliver him. When God makes a wound in the spirit, the whole world cannot make a plaister broad enough to cover it.

2. Secondly, The world is a vain and useless thing at the hour of death. Possibly, many of us may never conflict with the terrors of conscience, nor have that conviction of the world's vanity: but yet we must all conflict with death, that king of terrors. Suppose therefore (what must certainly once be) that we were now gasping our last, our tongues faltering, our eye-strings breaking, our limbs quivering, a dead cold and stiffness invading us; were our souls tost to and fro upon our expiring breath, and, like wrecks at sea, sometimes cast up, and by and by sucked back again; what could stand us in stead, and make our passage happy at such a time as this? Now the soul requires the strongest, the richest cordials. Prepare it one mingled of the best ingredients the whole world can afford; cast into the cup, riches, honour, pleasure, the quintessence of all that is here desirable; yet, alas! what is all this world to a dying man who is just leaving it?

Thy wicked companions, with whom thou hast laughed and sinned away thy freshest years, will in this thy last extremity forsake thee: or if they do attend so sad a spectacle, alas! what miserable comforts will they be? They will then prove another bad conscience to thee, and bring to thy remembrance, with horror, the sins which thou hast committed by their enticement, or they by thine. Thy mirth and jollity will then be turned into groans and howlings: all things will stare ruthfully upon thee, and when thou callest upon them for help, confess their impotency to rescue thee from the gripe of death, and from the doom of justice.

Sickness is usually a busy time with conscience; and when it is packing up for a remove into the other world, it will be sure to gather together all the sins of a man's life, and bind them as an heavy and insupportable burthen upon his soul. Can thy sensual pleasures divert thee now? As they have served thee to pass away the tediousness of time, can they serve to pass away the infinite tediousness of eternity? Nay, how can it otherwise be, but that a mind long soaked and softened by these, should be made the more capable of receiving deep impressions of grief, anguish, and despair?

Indeed, while we eagerly pursue any of these worldly enjoyments we are but running after a shadow: and as shadows vanish, and are swallowed up in the greater shade of night; so, when the night of death shall cast its thick shade about us, and wrap us up in deep and substantial darkness, all these vain shadows will then disappear and vanish quite out of sight.

Now, could we have the same opinion of the world in the time of our health and prosperity, as we shall certainly have when we lie languishing and drawing on to eternity, we should be able then, with a generous scorn, to live above it, and despise it. Shall we prize those comforts, which will be none to us when we have the greatest need of comfort? Shall we glue our affections to that which either is so faithless that it will not, or so weak that it cannot help us; so vain a thing is it, that it cannot resist the disgrace that sleep or only winking doth. Shut but your eyes, and what becomes of all the pomp and lustre, the beauty and splendor that we so much admire in the world? It all vanisheth into darkness and nothing: sleep snatcheth us from it, and for the time, we have no more enjoyment of it than if we were dead. Every night we die in our beds, and yet every day are so immersed in the pleasures and businesses of the world, as if we were never to die indeed. Since therefore we have higher and nobler objects to fix our affections on, let us not lavish them out upon these worldly vanities, which can at no time prove real comforts unto us; and then least of all, when we have most need of comfort. That is a seventh demonstration.

VIII. Again, All things in the world are vain, because they are unsuitable.

True

True indeed, they are suited to the necessities of the body, and serve to feed and clothe that; but he is a beast, or worse, that reckons himself provided for when only his bodily wants are supplied. Have we not all of us precious and immortal souls, capable and desirous of happiness? Do not these crave to be satisfied? Do they not deserve to be heard? Shall our vile bodies, which are but dust and worms meat, engross all our care how to please and pamper them, and shall the necessities of our never-dying souls be neglected? What have you laid up in store for these? Alas! that which most men busy themselves about is to heap up temporal riches, *to join house to house, and land to land, that they might dwell alone upon the earth.* (Isa. v. 8.) But know, thou dost but give thy soul husks and swines meat, when thou settest the whole world before it.

And therefore our Saviour justly brands the rich man in the gospel for a fool, that, when he had stuffed up his barns with corn, said to his soul, *Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years.* (Luke, xii. 19.) A fool indeed to measure the soul's goods by the barn or by the bushel. The very same is the folly of most men, who think they are in all respects well provided for if they can but scrape together a great estate, whereas the soul can no more live upon these things than the body can upon a thought or notion.

There is a three-fold unsuitableness between worldly things and the soul:

1. First, The soul is spiritual; these are drossy and material. Of all things belonging to a man, his breath is the most subtle, invisible, and spiritual. But now the soul is called the *breath of God*, (Gen. ii. 7.) and therefore must needs be spiritual in a high degree. And what then hath a spiritual soul to do with clods of earth, or acres of land, with barns full of corn, or bags full of gold? These are too thick and gross to correspond with its refined nature: but rather bring spiritual things to spiritual. God, who is the *Father of spirits*, (Heb. xii. 9.) his love and favour, an interest in him, and communion with him, the consolations of the Holy Ghost, the actings of grace and the hopes of glory; these spiritual and clarified essences, which a carnal eye cannot see, nor a carnal judgment value; these are most suitable to the soul, that is a spirit, and ought not to be unequally

yoked to the dregs and dross of earthly enjoyments.

2. Secondly, The soul is immortal, but all worldly things are perishing, and wear out in the using: and therefore it was but small comfort when the rich man sung his requiem, to say, *Soul, take thy ease, thou hast goods laid up for many years.* Thou fool! what is an estate for many years to a soul whose duration is not measured by years but by eternity? What, when those years of plenty are expired? How destitute will thy soul be when it shall have out-lived all its good things? It may outlive them even in this world. God may nip and blast all that thou settest thy heart on, and make all thy comforts fall off from thee like so many withered leaves. However, if thou hast no other than what this miserable world can afford, thou shalt certainly outlive them in the world to come: and what wilt thou do, not in those years, but in that eternity of famine?

As it is with those that are invited to feast in some noble family, the furniture is rich, the entertainment splendid and magnificent; but when they depart, they cannot of all that pomp and bravery carry any thing away with them: so is it here; the world is God's great house, richly furnished, and we well entertained in it; we have all things liberally afforded us for our use; but nothing of all is ours. And therefore God hath set that grim porter, Death, at his gate, to see that as we brought nothing into it, so we carry nothing out of it. What a sad parting hour will it be to the soul, when it must go into another world, and leave all that it admired and loved behind in this? How will it protract and linger? How loth will it be to enter upon so great a journey, and carry nothing to defray the charges of it? Certainly, dying must needs be a terrible thing to those who have gotten nothing but what they can no longer keep, when their souls must be set on shore in a vast and black eternity, all naked and destitute, having nothing to relieve or support them.

3. Thirdly, The necessities of the soul are altogether of another kind than those which worldly things are able to supply; and therefore they are wholly unsuitable. Natural things may well serve for natural wants. Food will satisfy hunger; and raiment fence off the injuries of the weather,

weather, and riches will procure both. But the soul's necessities are spiritual, and these no natural thing can reach. It wants a price to redeem it; nothing can do this but the precious blood of Christ. It wants pardon and forgiveness; nothing can grant it but the free and abundant mercy of God. It wants sanctification and holiness, comfort and assurance; nothing can effect these but the Holy Ghost. Here all worldly things fall short. The exigencies of the outward man they may supply; but the greatest abundance of them can never quiet a troubled conscience, nor appease an angry God, nor remove the condemning guilt of the least sin: no, *the redemption of the soul is precious*, (more precious than to be purchased by these poor things,) *and it ceaseth for ever.* (Psal. xlix. 8.)

Possibly now in the time of your peace and prosperity, you regard not these spiritual wants; but when the days of sorrow and darkness shall come upon you, when God shall drop into your consciences a little of his wrath and displeasure, you may as well seek to cure a wound in your body by applying a plaister to your garment, as seek to ease a wounded spirit by all the treasures, pleasures, and enjoyments, of this world. *Riches* (saith the Wise Man) *profit not in the day of wrath* (Prov. xi. 4.): for indeed they cannot reach the soul to bring any true solace to it.

Thus you see how unsuitable the world is to the soul. Unsuitable to the nature of it, for the soul is spiritual, but all earthly enjoyments are drossy and material; the soul is immortal, but these are all perishing: unsuitable also to the necessities of the soul, which they can never reach nor supply.

IX. Again, The vanity of the world appears in its inconstancy and fickleness. God's providence administers all things here below in perpetual vicissitudes. His hand turns them about like so many *wheels*, (to which they are compared, Ezek. i.) the same part is now uppermost, and anon lowermost; now lifted up in the air, and by and by grated through the mire. This is the mutable condition of the world. And therefore we find it compared to the *moon*, (Rev. xii. 1.) where the church is described to be *cloathed with the sun, and to have the moon* (that is, the world) *under her feet.*

And well may it bear the resemblance, for it is still waxing and waning, sometimes full of brightness, at other times scarce a small streak of light to be discerned. There are none of us but have had experience in some kind or other of the inconstancy of these sublunary enjoyments. When the sun shines bright and warm, all the flowers of the field open and display their leaves to receive him into their bosoms; but when night comes, they fold together, and shut up all their glories; and though they were like so many little suns shining here below, able, one would think, to force a day for themselves; yet when the sun withdraws his beams, they droop and hang the head, and stand neglected, dull and obscure things. So hath it fared with us: while God hath shone upon us with warm and cherishing influences, we opened and spread, and flourished into a great pomp and glory: but he only hides his face, draws in his beams, and all our beautiful leaves shut up or fall to the ground, and leave us a bare stalk, poor and contemptible.

Or, if there have been no such considerable mutations in what concerns us, yet the revolutions that God hath of late years brought upon others, so beyond expectation or example, may well instruct us in the vanity of the world, and make us no less condemn it than admire that infinite wisdom that governs it.

It is said of the wheels, *that they went upon their four sides* (Ezek. i. 17.): for one wheel intersecting and crossing another, the whole must needs consist of four sides or semicircles; and moving upon these four sides, it must of necessity move very ruggedly by jolts and jerks. So truly the providences of God do sometimes move unevenly, as cross wheels would do moving upon their sides. Great and sudden changes are often brought to pass without being ripened by sensible degrees, but happen by the surprisal of some unexpected providence, and, as it were, by the sudden jerk of the wheel, shaking off those who sat on the top, and crushing them in its passage over.

It is true, these mutations, which to us seem so confused and tumultuary, are all orderly and harmonious in the divine counsel and fore-knowledge. There is not a providence that breaks its rank,

nor

nor a wheel that moves out of its track; and there is a destined end for them all, the glory of the Almighty Creator; to which, while every creature pursues its own inclinations, he sweetly and yet efficaciously sways them. They are all like arrows shot at a mark by an unerring hand: some are shot point-blank, and some by compass, but none so carelessly as to miss it. Though changes may surprise us, yet they do not surprise God: but as it is a great pleasure to us to see our designs and forecasts accomplished; so infinite wisdom delights itself to look on, and see how all things start up into their place and order, as soon as called forth by his efficacious decree and foreknowledge. Among all the weighty and arduous cares of governing the world, it is (if I may so express it) the recreation of Providence to amuse mankind with some wonderful events; that when we cannot find out the connexion and dependence of second causes, we may humbly acquiesce in adoring the absolute sovereignty of the first; and by observing the mutations of affairs here below, may be taught to repose ourselves in Him who only is immutable. Thus God administers the various occurrences of the world according to the counsel of his own will; and makes the inconstancy of it serve both for his delight and our admonition.

It is in vain therefore to expect happiness from what is so uncertain. All the comforts of it are but like fading flowers, that, while we are looking on them and smelling to them, die and wither in our hands. Is it pleasures we seek? These must vary: for where there is not an intermission, it is not pleasure but a glut and surfeit. And hence it is that they who are used to hardships, taste more sweetness in some ordinary pleasures than those who are accustomed to a voluptuous life, do in all their exquisite and invented delights. Do you pursue honour and applause in the world? This hangs upon the wavering tongues of the multitude: to follow this is but to pursue a puff of wind, and of all winds in nature the most fickle and changeable. The people's Hosanna and Crucify are oft pronounced in the same breath. And besides that it is no great matter that those should think or speak well of thee who have but too much reason to think ill of

themselves; besides this, consider how soon public fame grows out of breath. Possibly an age or two may talk of thee, but this bruit is but like successive echos, that render the voice still weaker and weaker, till at length it vanisheth into silence. Yea, couldst thou fill whole chronicles with thy story, yet time or moths will eat thee out; and the fresher remembrance of other men's actions will bury thine in oblivion. Is it riches you desire? These too are uncertain; *Charge them that they trust not in uncertain riches.* (1 Tim. vi. 17.) Uncertain they are in getting, and uncertain in keeping when got. All our treasures are like quicksilver, which strangely slips between our fingers when we think we hold it fastest. *Riches* (saith the Wise Man, Prov. xxiii. 5.) *make themselves wings, and fly away as an eagle towards heaven*; and it were a most strange folly to fall passionately in love with a bird upon his wing, who is free and unconfined as the air in which he flies, and will not stoop to thy call or lure. How much better were it, since they will fly, for thyself to direct their flight towards heaven, by relieving the necessitous servants and members of Jesus Christ? Then will their flight be happy and glorious, when they carry on their wings the prayers and blessings of the poor, whose bowels thou hast refreshed. This is to lay up treasure in heaven, to remit thy monies to the other world, where they shall be truly paid thee with abundant interest. This is to lay up a stock for hereafter, that thou mayest have whereon to live splendidly and gloriously to all eternity. And thus to lay out is to lay up, to lay up uncertain riches in a safe repository: God's promises shall be thy security, and every star in heaven a seal set upon the treasury-door which none can break or violate.

Thus you see how mutable and inconstant all worldly things are: so that we may truly apply that which the psalmist speaks of the earth in another sense, that *God hath founded it upon the sea, and established it upon the floods.* (Psal. xxiv. 2.) Such is the waving and fluctuation of all things here below, that they are no more constant than if they were merely built upon the ebbing and flowing of the tide.

X. Lastly, The vanity of the world appears in this, that it is altogether unsatisfactory.

satisfactory. That must needs be vain which, when we enjoy it in its greatest abundance, can give us no real nor solid content. Such an empty thing is the whole world. You may as soon grasp a bundle of dreams, or take up an armful of your own shadow, as fill the vast and boundless desires of your souls with these earthly enjoyments. And therefore the psalmist, speaking of prosperous sinners, sets forth their state by the most thin and empty things imaginable: *As a dream when one awakes, so, O Lord, thou shalt despise their image.* (Psalm lxxiii. 30.) The images and representations that a dream makes seem very brisk and lively; but when we reflect upon them with our waking thoughts, we find them confused and impertinent. Such is all the prosperity of this world, it is but as the image and fiction of a dream.

As an hungry man that dreams he is at a furnished table, and fills himself with all varieties of delicacies (Isa. xxix. 8.), how joyful and how pleased is he, how fully satisfied, if he were not to wake again! But some one jogs or calls him; he wakes, and finds himself hunger-starved, nothing fed but his fancy: so is it with us in this world. While the soul lies under the coverlet of this body, it sleeps: and one thinks himself rich; another, great and noble; a third, learned and wise: but, alas! all this is only a dream: when either afflictions or death make a noise and call upon him, the sleepy soul awakes, and finds itself empty and hunger-starved, after all the imaginary store it enjoyed.

Now, the unsatisfactoriness of the world may be clearly evinced by these two things:

1. First, In that the highest condition we can attain unto, cannot free us from cares and crosses. Yea indeed it is so far from freeing us, that it rather encreaseth them. It doth but make us spread the wider, and stand the fairer mark for trouble. And yet we are like children that think the sky lies on yonder hill; thither they run, hoping to touch it there: when they come, they find it dislodged to another hill; after it they run, and pursue it from hill to hill, and, after all their pains and sweat, find themselves as far below it as at first: so it fares with us; we think happiness and true content lies in some condition above us; thither we hasten,

hoping we shall reach it there; when we arrive thither, we find the happiness we sought for is dislodged, and seems to us to rest in a condition above that: but when we attain this too, still we are as far below happiness and satisfaction as we were in our lowest estate.

When we change our outward condition, be it to never so great advantage, we do not lose, but only change our cares. If we are freed from the cares and crosses of a poor and private life; we fall into those of a pompous and envied greatness, which are both more numerous, and more oppressive. The man that lies most compacted, and in least compass in the world, is like to escape best: whereas the great ones, that take up much room, do only shew in how many places and concerns they are liable to be wounded. It is not therefore any thing in this world that can give you satisfaction. All the enjoyments of it are to the soul as wind to the stomach: they may gripe it, but they can never satisfy it. Indeed so vain are they, that they scarce have any other proof of their reality, but the pain and torment they bring with them.

Secondly, The world appears to be unsatisfactory, in that, be our condition what it will, yet still we desire change. We can no more rest in an high estate than in a low; but still we desire something farther and something better. As sick men toss to and fro, from side to side, thinking to find ease by changing their posture; whereas it is not their outward posture but their inward distemper that is the cause of their restlessness: so do we endeavour to change and shift conditions in the world, and lie sometimes in one posture and sometimes in another, but yet are restless in all; for wheresoever we tumble, we carry our disease with us; false opinions, and foolish hopes, and impotent desires, and fond designs, which make us complain of our present state, and wish the amendment of that, when nothing wants cure but ourselves.

The servant thinks he shall be a happy man when he is made free. Is the freeman happy? No: but he shall be when he hath gotten such an estate. Is the rich man happy? No: but he shall be when he is invested with such an honour and dignity. Well; is the honourable man happy? No: unless he be supreme. And those who are supreme cannot think themselves

themselves completely happy unless they be universal monarchs; and those who were so, we find they could not rest there, but would needs be adored for gods. O whither do the boundless desires of men hurry them! Nothing in this world can put a stop to them.

It was a pertinent discourse of Cineas, dissuading Pyrrhus from undertaking a war against the Romans: Sir, (saith he,) when you have conquered them, what will you do next? Then Sicily is near at hand, and easy to master. And what when you have subdued Sicily? Then we will pass over to Afric, and take Carthage, which cannot long withstand us. When these are conquered, what will be your next attempt? Then (saith Pyrrhus) we will fall in upon Greece and Macedon, and recover what we have lost there. Well, when all are subdued, what fruit do you expect from all your victories? Then (saith he) we will sit down and enjoy ourselves. Sir, (replies Cineas,) may we not do it now? Have you not already a kingdom of your own? And he that cannot enjoy himself with a kingdom, cannot with the whole world. Such are the designs of men, and so we may answer them. Most are projecting how they may get such an estate; then, how they may raise themselves to honour, and think that their advancement in both will bring them satisfaction. Alas! this will not do. Their desires will still run before them: and they may as well sit down content where they are, as where they hope to be.

And the reason of this unsatisfactoriness in worldly things is, because none of them are so good as the soul is. The soul, next to angels, is the very top and cream of the whole creation, other things are but dregs and lees compared to it. Now that which is our happiness must be better than ourselves; for it must perfect us. But these things being far worse and inferior, the soul in cleaving to them, is secretly conscious that it abaseth and disparageth itself; and therefore cannot find true satisfaction. Nothing can fill the soul but that which eminently contains in it all good. But now, as light is only divided and parcelled out among the stars, but is all united in the sun; so goodness is only parcelled out among the creatures; this creature hath some share, and that another; not any of

them contains the whole sum of goodness. This is proper to God only, who is the author and original of them all, in whom all excellencies and perfections are concentrated: and therefore in him alone can be found that rest and satisfaction which the soul in vain seeks for in anything besides himself.

These are the demonstrations of the world's vanity; which, though they be many and various, yet I doubt not but every man's particular experience may furnish him with divers others. But whatever our observations are, the uses we may make of them are these:

First, It should teach us to admire and adore the good providence of God to his children, in so ordering it, that the world should be thus vain, and deal so ill with those who serve it: for if it were not so infamous and deceitful as it is, if it did not frustrate and disappoint our hopes, and pay us with vexation, when it promiseth fruition and content; what thinkest thou, O Christian, would be the end of this? Would any one think of God, or remember heaven, and the life to come? St. Augustine somewhere speaks excellently, *Turbat me mundus, et ego eum diligo; quid si non turbaret?* The world troubles and molests me, and yet I love it; what if it did not trouble me? Certainly we should fall into an utter forgetfulness of God, if we could find any true satisfaction here. We should never think of returning to the fountain of living waters, if we could find enough in cisterns to quench the thirst of our souls. And therefore God deals with us, as some great person would do with a disobedient son that forsakes his house, and riots among his tenants: his father gives order they should treat him ill, affront, and chase him from them, and all, that he might reduce him. The same doth God: man is his wild and debauched son; he flies from the commands of his father, and cannot endure to live under his strict and severe government. Whither goes he, but to the pleasures of the world, and revels and riots among the creatures? But God resolves to recover him, and therefore commands every creature to handle him roughly. Burn him, fire; toss him, tempests, and shipwreck his estate; forsake him, friends; designs, fail him; children, be rebellious to him, as he is to me; let his supports and dependencies

sink

sink under him, his riches melt away, leave him poor, and despised, and destitute. These are all God's servants, and must obey his will. And to what end is all this, but that, seeing himself forsaken of all, he may at length, like the beggared prodigal, return again to his father.

Secondly, If the vanity of the world be such, and so great; if it be only an empty bubble, a swelling nothing, less solid than the dream of a shadow; if it be thus unfuitable, uncertain, and unsatisfactory, as I have demonstrated to you: what gross folly then are most men guilty of in setting so high a price upon that which is of no worth nor substance? Though formerly we have been so much deceived as to take the world's paint and varnish for true beauty, and its glittering for substantial treasure; yet now, since the cheat is discovered, since you have seen this false pack opened, and nothing but counterfeit wares obtruded upon you, your folly will be inexcusable, if after experiments and admonitions you should contribute any longer to your own cheat, and set a price upon things which you know to be vile and worthless. The Wise Man (as you have heard) sums up their whole value only in a great cipher, and a great blot, *vanity and vexation*. At what price would you rate *vanity*, which is nothing? or *vexation*, which is worse than nothing?

And therefore our Saviour compares the things of this world to thorns; *some fell among thorns* (Mark, iv. 9.): which thorns he interprets to be the *cares of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches*. (v. 19.) Now, he were a mad man that, to assuage his hunger, would attempt to swallow a bush of thorns. No less is the madness and extreme folly of most men, who, to satisfy the eager appetite of an hungry and indigent soul, gape after the thorns of this world, and chew thistles; which, instead of yielding them either grapes or figs, will only serve to pierce them through with innumerable sorrows.

A man's wisdom or folly is commonly judged by the bargains he makes. If he lay out that which is very precious to purchase what is of no worth, this we justly account a foolish bargain. If, on the other hand, he purchase that which is of great price with something little

worth, we account it a wise and thriving bargain. Now here we may see the gross folly of most men. Though they are wise enough in bartering one part of the world for another, yet they shew themselves very fools in purchasing any part of the world with that which is no part of it. The scripture hath told us, that all that is in the world, is honour, pleasure, or profit. While we only traffick with these for one another, we do not amiss. The world is a proper price for itself; and doubtless we may lawfully part with some worldly advantages to procure others: but then there are other things which do not belong to the world under this acception; our affections, our consciences, our precious and immortal souls. And these God hath given us to trade with for heaven and eternal glory. Now herein lies the folly of most men, that they purchase the vile things of this world with such an inestimable price, and extravagantly outbid themselves to procure trifles with that which might procure them eternal happiness. More particularly,

1. First, Is it not extreme folly to lavish our precious affections upon vile and vain objects? Affections are the wings of the soul, without which the soul itself were but a dull and unactive carcass. These God hath given it, that it might be able to take its flight to heaven, and lodge itself in his bosom. Now how unworthy a thing is it, only to flutter to and fro upon the surface of the earth, to clog and clatter these wings with mire and dirt, which were at first made to take so high and so noble a flight?

The apostle hath commanded us to *set our affections on things above, and not on things on the earth*. (Col. iii. 2.) And indeed, there is great reason for it. For the two choice affections of the soul are love and joy. Now that is most worthy our love that can return a joy most worthy of us. But the joy that the world gives is usually tumultuous, always checked with some secret annoy, and it ends with a dulness and damp upon the spirits. It is but like the empty *crackling of thorns under a pot*, (Eccles. vii. 6.) that for the present makes a great noise and blaze, but suddenly vanisheth all away into smoke. Whereas an heavenly Christian feels sometimes a ponderous and weighty joy, a joy springing up in his soul

soul almost intolerable, and altogether unutterable, a joy that melts him into ecstasies and rapture. How infinitely doth he then disdain that any soul should be so wretchedly sottish, as to prefer the world before or equalize it with God! He thinks the happiness he then enjoys so great, that although he believes it is, yet he cannot conceive how it should be more or greater in heaven itself: then the soul claps its wings, it would fain take its flight and be gone; it breathes, it pants, it reaches after God, and falls into an agony of joy and desire inconceivably mixed together. Can the world give us any such over-powering joy as this? It may afford us corn and wine, the weak recruits of a frail life: but when it hath emptied all its store and abundance into our bosoms, it is not worthy to be mentioned with the love and favour of God, which is *better than life itself*. (Ps. lxxiii. 3.) And therefore the psalmist makes it his prayer; *Lord, lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon us: thou hast put gladness in my heart, more than in the time their corn and wine increased*. (Psalm iv. 6.)

The joy of the world resembles a torrent; as upon a glut of rain you shall have a torrent come rolling along with noise and violence, overflowing its banks, and bearing all before it; yet it is but muddy and impure water, and it is soon gone and dried up: such is all the joy this world can give; it makes a great noise, it is commonly immoderate and swells beyond its due bounds, yet it is but a muddy and impure joy, it soon rolls away, and leaves nothing behind but a drought in the soul. Now since the world's joy is but such a poor empty thing as this, it is most gross folly for us to lay out our best love upon that which cannot repay us with the best joy.

2. Secondly, If the world be thus vain, what folly is it to lay out our most serious cares and contrivances upon it! The cares of worldly men are most absurd and irrational. Ask them why they care; they will tell you it is that they may live without care: and yet the more they get, the more do their cares swarm and encrease about them. To what purpose do they thus disquiet themselves? They were as good make nets to catch the wind, as lay plots either to obtain or secure a world, which is so slippery and so full of disappointments, that neither they who have

it are sure of keeping it, nor they who have it not, of getting it. We may observe a kind of coyness in the world; those who court it most and pursue it closest, oftentimes miss of their designs, because they overact them; and it is commonly seen, that those who (as we used to say) have many irons in the fire, get nothing thereby but only the burning of their own fingers.

It is true, there is a prudential and providential care that is so far from being chargeable with folly, that it is necessary, and a great part of our duty, not only as we are men, but as we are Christians (1 Tim. v. 8.): and this prudential care is, when we do what lawfully we may, to procure the comforts of life; and then, with all quietness and indifferency, submit the success to God: this is a care of diligence: but that which is justly branded with folly, is a care of diffidence, which is always accompanied with torment, fears, and distractions about the success and issue, and most unreasonably vexeth us for what is not in our power to determine: such a care as this usurps upon God; and certainly it is no less a fault to invade God's part than to neglect our own, and a like folly. The right temper a Christian should observe in procuring any worldly comfort, is to interest his judgment in the choice of means, but to keep his affections disinterested and unconcerned in the event. But when we are anxious how our designs will succeed, we make it a torment to us in getting, before we can make it a comfort to us in enjoying.

To what purpose then dost thou, O worldling, rack thy brains with contrivances, how to fill thy bags with treasure, how to empty them out with advantage? When thou hast added heap to heap, of all thy store thou enjoyest no more than what thou eatest, or drinkest, or wearest: and of this too thou enjoyest no more than will just suffice to satisfy thy hunger, to quench thy thirst, and to fence off the injuries of the weather: all the rest turns either to diseases or burthens. True reason will teach us to chuse our estates as we would do our garments, not those which are largest, but those which are fittest for us. Vast and overflowing estates are but like huge enormous rudders, that rather serve to sink the ship, than steer it: their abundance is useless, and

and their excess dangerous. To what end therefore is all our care and carking, all our perplexing and solicitous thoughts, those parching and consuming distractions, which can hasten on nothing but our own natural decays; to what end are they, unless it be to contradict our Saviour, and shew that we have a power to make *our black hairs white?* (Matt. v. 36.) When we lay subtle and intricate designs to obtain the things of this world, we are but like spiders, that, with a great deal of art and labour, weave a curious cobweb only to catch flies, and possibly spend more of their bowels in framing it than the prey they catch can again repair; yea, and it may be too, before the prey be caught, both they and their web are swept down together and trod into dust. So when we frame designs to get any worldly advantage, it is but taking a great deal of pains to catch a fly; and possibly before it be caught, the rude hand of death wraps us about in our cobweb, and sweeps us down into the grave, and *in that very moment we, and all our well-laid projects perish together.* (Psal. cxlvi. 4.)

3. Thirdly, If the world be thus vain, what extreme and prodigious folly is it to take as much pains to secure the poor and perishing concerns of it as would suffice to secure heaven and eternal glory, were they laid out that way? We labour for the bread that perisheth; and we perish with it in our very mouths: about this are our hearts, our hands, our strength, our time employed: whereas the great things of eternity are so utterly neglected by us as if they were none of our concerns to look after. Were we but as labourers in our Christian calling, as we commonly are in our worldly callings, salvation would not lie upon our hands unwrought; God and Christ, and all heaven, were ours. Who would doubt, when they see men so busy about importunesses, and the trivial affairs of this world, but that they were much more anxious about their souls? Who would not conclude, that certainly their great work is already done, that shall see them so earnest and solicitous about petty matters? But, alas! it may astonish men and angels, that rational creatures, who have immortal souls, souls whose endless duration must abide either in inconceivable misery or bliss, should trifle away that time and

strength which might secure their everlasting happiness, about those vain nothings that have neither happiness in them, nor continuance. Certainly, the service of God is not more painful than the drudgery of the world: and sure I am, it is far more cleanly. Thou shalt not in his service set thine hand to any foul office: whereas the world employs thee basely to rake together thick clay, and load thyself with it; and the devil, yet worse, to rake in the mire and filth of all manner of defilements which now pollute the soul, and will hereafter damn it: both these are most grievous task-masters. Some *draw iniquity with cords of vanity, and sin as it were with a cart-rope.* (Isa. v. 18.) They are so enslaved to the work of the devil, that he puts them into his team, makes them draw and strain for their iniquities, and doth them a courtesy when their sins come easily: he makes them toil and sweat in carrying faggots to their own fire, and blowing up those flames which must for ever burn them. Others (as the prophet expresseth it, Hab. ii. 13.) *labour in the fire, and weary themselves for very vanity.* They take great pains in the world, and meet with great disappointments; for both are signified by *labouring in the fire*, where what they produce cannot be enjoyed, but is consumed between their hands.

Since then you must take so much pains either for sin or vanity, why will you not be persuaded rather to lay it out upon that which is substantially good, and eternally so? God requires not more, but only other work from you: and the many things that Martha was careful about, religion and holiness reduceth to the one thing necessary; which, though it contains many particular duties under it, yet by reason of its uniformity and subserviency to itself, is less distracting and cumbersome. The wheels of a watch move and click as fast when it goes false as when it goes true; and if it be but set right at first, the same activity of the spring will so continue it, which before made its motion irregular: so it is here; the same activity and industry which you irregularly use in pursuit of the world, would procure heaven and glory for you, were it that way directed. Your cares, your contrivances, your endeavours, need be no more than now they are; only what before you laid out upon the world, re-

serve now for heaven. And how infinitely reasonable is this! Certainly they are most stupidly foolish, that will take up vanity at as dear a rate as happiness, and give as much for vexation as for endless joy.

4. Fourthly, If the things of this world be so vain, what inexcusable folly is it to part with the peace or the purity of our consciences for them! and yet what more common? If men can get any thing of the world at the price of a sin, they think they have made a gainful bargain: and therefore the devil hath recourse to this as his most prevailing temptation. When he set on our Saviour in the wilderness, the last assault was, *All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me.* (Mat. iv. 9.) And when this battery could not make a breach, he raiseth his siege, as despairing of success: and this is the usual temptation by which he assaults others. Judas comes with his *quid dabitis*, what will you give me? (Mat. xxvi. 15.) and sets Christ and his own conscience to sale, for the inconsiderable sum of *thirty pieces*. (Exod. xxi. 32.) He demands no more than the common market price of a slave (not amounting to above eight and thirty shillings) for the Lord of life and glory; and thinks his bargain so good, that he gives himself to the devil for vantage. This is the very root of all that injustice, and rapine, and oppression, and violence, that is to be found among men: they all strive and tug who shall get most of this earth from one another, and lose heaven and their own consciences in the scuffle. This is it that makes men so oft shift their sails, that they may run before every wind that blows. If times grow rough and tempestuous, and they must throw over board either their gain or their godliness; this persuades them to make shipwreck of faith and a good conscience, only that they may bear up in this world, though they sink hereafter. Now, what deplorable folly is this! when thy conscience is disquieted with the tormenting review of past crimes, what will all thy ill-gotten wealth avail thee? Thou wilt then with extreme horror cast thy eyes upon all thy treasures of wickedness, when conscience shall tell thee, thou hast not only treasured up them, but wrath too against the day of wrath.

Fifthly, What desperate folly is it to purchase a vain world with the loss of our precious souls! So our Saviour, *What is a man profited if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?* (Matt. xvi. 26.) O think what great losers they must needs be, who lose their souls to gain the world, and must at last lose the world too, together with their souls! This is the only thing that damns men, that they prefer the pleasures, honours, profits, and pitiful nothings of this world, before their precious and immortal souls, which are more worth than ten thousand worlds. What is this but a stupidity as gross as that of the old heathens, to make a vile worm our God, and sacrifice an ox to it; or a monster our God, and sacrifice a man to it? Think how dreadful and grating will be the reflections of worldlings in hell, to consider that there they must lie and burn to eternity, for their inordinate love to that world, of which they have nothing left them besides the bitter remembrance. What will it then avail them that they have lived here in ease and delights, when all their mirth shall be turned into groans and howlings? What will all their treasures and riches avail them, when these shall be melted down about them to encrease their torment? Believe it, it is sad to be left to the conviction of that day when the vanity of earth shall appear in the torments of hell. Be persuaded therefore, as you have renounced it in all its pomps and vanities, when you gave up your names to Christianity, so to renounce it likewise in your lives; habitually, at all times, by sitting loose from it, and living above it; and actually, whensoever God calls for any of your temporal enjoyments, that is, when you cannot keep them without wounding your consciences and hazarding your souls.

Thirdly, Another use may be this: If the world be thus vain and empty, why then should we pride ourselves in, or prize ourselves by any poor enjoyments of it? How foolish is it to account thyself a better man than another, only because thy dunghill is a little bigger than his! These things are not at all to be reckoned into the value and worth of a man; they are all without thee, and concern thee no more than fine clothes do the health or strength

strength of the body. It is wealth indeed that makes all the noise and bustle in the world, and challengeth all the respect and honour to itself; and the ignorant vulgar, whose eyes are dazzled with pomp and bravery, pay it with a stupid and astonished reverence. Yet know, that it is but thy silks and velvet, thy lands or thy retinue and servants, they venerate, not thee; and if thou thinkest otherwise, thou art as justly ridiculous as that ass in the apologue, that grew very gravely proud, and took state when the people fell prostrate before him, adoring not him but the idol he carried.

Those things which belong to the perfection of a man are all within him; knowledge, and wisdom, and temperance, a serene mind and calm affections, an inflexible virtue, and a soul constant and true to itself in all occurrences. Give me such an one that can stand firm and unshaken upon his own basis when the whole world totters; that knows what is just and honest, and dares do it; that is master of his own passions, and scorns to be a slave to another's: such an one, in his rags and poverty, is a far better man than those gay things, who owe all their parts, and wisdom, and virtue, to their rentals, and whose tenants and stewards bring them in the yearly revenue of their reputation. But then suppose this excellent person endowed with divine grace, and the true fear and love of God, and this will exalt him above the highest and greatest of other men as far as they themselves are above the vilest of beasts. Solomon tells us, *That the heart of the wicked is little worth* (Prov. x. 20.); it is of no price nor value; and shall his estate be, when his heart is not? Indeed nothing makes us rich, as men, but wisdom and virtue; nor as Christians, but piety and holiness: and in these, which are the only true and substantial riches, the poorest Christian may vie stakes with all the world. Drop millions of gold, boundless revenues, ample territories, crowns and sceptres, and a poor contemptible Christian lays his one God against all these, and beggars them.

4. Fourthly, If the world and all the enjoyments of it be thus vain, this should fortify us against the fear of death, which can deprive us of nothing but what is both vain and vexatious.

Life is nothing else but an huddle of business, a great swarm of employments that have more stings in them than honey. If we be great, we are but the larger hives for cares; if honourable, we are but raised above others to be the more weather-beaten. An high degree in this world doth but shelter other men's cares under our wings, and adopt other men's troubles as a wretched supplement to our own. If our estate be mean and low, as it exposeth us to contempt and injuries, so it engageth us to rescue ourselves from the pressures of poverty by our own sweat and industry. Those few things that are necessary to a comfortable subsistence in the world, will yet cost us care and labour, an aching heart, and a weary hand; and this turns our bread into stones, and our fish into scorpions. If we have too much business in the world, our callings become a burthen or temptation to us: and if we have none, we become a burthen to ourselves and to others. God hath written vanity and vexation upon every condition; and if his providence create not troubles for us, yet our own folly will. Thus hath man made himself a slave and drudge to the world, over which God hath made him lord.

Why then should death be so terrible, which comes only to ease us of our burthen, to stroke the sweat from our brows, and to give us a profound rest from all our labours in the bed of the grave? *There* (as Job saith) *the weary be at rest* (iii. 17.); and all cares and troubles vanish, as soon as our heads touch that pillow. *There is no work nor device in the grave whither we are going*, but a deep repose, a secure retirement, where none of the vexations of this life shall ever find us.

And as it frees us from all the cares, so from all the sorrows of this world. What is our life but a bubble? Our sighs are the air, and our tears the water that make it. The first possession that we take of this world is by crying; and there is nothing in it that we hold by a surer tenure than our griefs. Tears are the inheritance of our eyes, either our sins call for them or our sufferings, and nothing can dry them up but the dust of the grave. Sometimes we lose a friend or near relation, the tribute we owe their memory must be paid down in tears:

sometimes their ungodly practices torment us, when by their lewdness and debaucheries they are lost both to their own interests and our hopes. Sometimes compassion of other men's sufferings affects us with a tender sorrow, and as if we had not grief enough springing up out of our own bowels, we call in foreign succours to augment the score. And many times tedious and lingering sicknesses waste us, grinding pains rack and torture us, which were far the more intolerable, but that they hasten on that death that puts an end and period to all a Christian's miseries. We are not concerned in the grave at the loss of some friends, nor the evil courses of others; what calamities befall the world, or those whom we loved dearest in it: there it troubles us not, though preferment go by the merit of flattery and baseness, while the generous and gallant soul starves through the mere rigour of his virtue. It concerns us nothing what stinking breath blasts our good name, or what unworthy foot treads upon our grave. Here a little pain molests us; but there whole limbs rot and fall off, and crumble into dust, without at all disturbing that quiet rest that buries all the cares and sorrows of this life in silence and oblivion. Where then is the dreadfulfulness of death, which only frees us from the troubles and crosses of a wretched life? It is unreasonable to complain of that change which delivers us from a world of which we are still complaining; and it is childish to quarrel at that hand which undresses us, and strips off our uneasy garments only to lay us to sleep.

5. Lastly, If the world be so vain and empty, we may learn to be well contented with our present state and condition, whatsoever it be. It hath been fully demonstrated that there can be no complete satisfaction in any estate; and why then should we desire change? The great ground of discontent is not our wants, but our desires. There is scarce any condition in the world so low but may satisfy our wants; and there is no condition so high as can satisfy our desires. If we live

according to the law of nature and reason, we shall never be poor; but if we live according to fond opinion and fancy, we shall never be rich. That which we have, be it never so little, is full as satisfactory as that which we hope for, be it never so great: for *vanity and vexation of spirit* is passed upon all that is in the world, whether it be more or less.

And therefore, O Christian, thou mayest well bear a narrow stint in the things of this world: if God reduce thee to a morsel of bread and cup of water, it is enough; this will suffice to bear thy charges to heaven; or if this too should fail, thy journey will only be the shorter. Possibly God keeps thee short in vanities, that he might bestow upon thee that which is a solid and substantial good. The psalmist tells us, that God *daily loads us with his benefits* (Psalm lxxviii. 9.): though some may have more than others, yet every one hath his load, as much as he can carry. Every vessel cannot bear up with the like sail; and therefore God, to keep us from overfetting, puts on so much as will safely bring us to heaven, our desired port.

Let us therefore *cast these cares and burthens upon him who hath promised to sustain us*, (Pl. lv. 22.) and turn the stream of our desires heavenward, where alone we can find permanent and satisfactory good. Walk humbly with God; keep yourselves always in an awful fear of his dread majesty; be constant in the exercise of grace, and the performance of duty: these are the only things exempted from vanity and vexation; in these alone can the soul find true rest and contentment. And therefore Solomon, after he had pierced and searched through all the world, and pronounced riches, strength, beauty, wisdom, learning, and all to be *vanity and vexation of spirit*; he rests himself in the close, and tells us, *Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter; fear God, and keep his commandments, for this is the whole of man* (Eccles. xii. 13.): it is his whole duty, and his only happiness in this life.

SERMON CXLII.

By GEORGE BULL, D. D.

Late Lord Bishop of St. David's.

The Measuring our Days of great Use
in Religion.

PSALM xxxix. 4.

Lord, make me to know mine end, and the measure of my days, what it is, that I may know how frail I am.

THIS thirty-ninth psalm, composed on the same occasion as the thirty-seventh, namely, on the scandal that David took at the prosperity of wicked men, whilst he was himself in misery, hath also a mixture of contemplation upon the vanity of all worldly things. The particular calamity that prompted David to this useful contemplation, is not by interpreters fully agreed on.

Many think that it was some sickness that David was at this time afflicted with. Others are of the opinion, that his trouble from Absalom was the particular occasion of the psalm.

But for myself, I incline to the first opinion, which I am confirmed in by the 11th verse, where David describes the beauty of man as consuming away like a moth at God's rebuke and correction; and by the 13th and last verse, where he prays, *that God would spare him, that he might recover strength before he should go hence and be no more.*

On which words a learned interpreter thus paraphrases:—Withhold thy scourge from me a little while, that I may recover my former strength, or health, before I am forced to depart out of this world, never more to return hither again.

This psalm is, by the wisdom of our church, appointed to be used in the office of the burial of the dead, as being almost wholly spent on the theme of the shortness and vanity of this our mortal life on earth; and is, indeed, a rich repository, or common place, of fit texts for funeral sermons.

As for the words which I have now chosen for the subject of my present discourse, they are evidently a devout prayer of David, relating to his death and departure out of this world. But it is questioned what the thing distinctly is for which David prays in these words,

Lord, make me to know mine end, and the measure of my days.

Some have thought that he prays for a special revelation from God of the time of his death, taken either precisely or with some latitude, how long he should live, when he should die and be called out of this world. Indeed this is a favour which it hath pleased God to grant unto some men. Thus Moses and Aaron, some time before their death, had notice given them of it, and of the place where they should lay themselves down and die, the one on Mount Hor, the other on Mount Nebo. (Deut. xxxii. 49, 50.) Thus Hezekiah had warning given him by the prophet Isaiah, to make his last will and testament, and to set his house in order, and prepare for his approaching death. (Isaiah, xxxviii. 1.) And when God was pleased, upon his earnest prayer and humble supplication, to relieve him from that death, under which, according to the course of nature, he must necessarily have fallen, and extraordinarily to add some more years unto his life, he had this second favour from God, to know, by the same prophet, the precise number of years so added, viz. fifteen years, no more nor no less. (Ver. 5.) Thus Elijah had a revelation from God before-hand of his translation from this earth to heaven, as we read 2 Kings, ii. And in the New Testament we find St. Peter was informed by our Lord Jesus of his approaching death and martyrdom: *I think it meet, as long as I am in this tabernacle, to stir you up, by putting you in remembrance; knowing that shortly I must put off this my tabernacle, even as our Lord Jesus Christ hath shewed me.* (2 Pet. i. 13, 14.)

In ecclesiastical history, in the acts of Polycarp, recited by Eusebius in the fourth book of his history, chap. xv. we read, that the blessed bishop and martyr, some days before his death, dreamed that the pillow on which he lay was first all in a flame about him, and then burnt to ashes; and thereupon awaking, he told the brethren that he was sure he should very shortly be burnt at the stake for the confession of the Christian faith, which accordingly came to pass. Nor do we want some certain instances in our own age, of persons so instructed by their guardian angel, or by some other means, as that they have been able, when in perfect health,

health, punctually to foretell the day of their death.

But these are extraordinary cases. The prescience or foreknowledge of the day or time of our death, is a thing for the most part unfit for us to ask of God, or for him to grant unto us; and therefore ordinarily the allwise and good God reserves it as a secret unto himself. If men generally knew the day of their death, the *ἀκύνετοι*, they of shorter lives would spend their few days in grief and sorrow, and be continually vexed to see their lives circumscribed within so narrow limits, and be sluggish to all noble and generous actions that require time and labour. On the other side, they that knew they had many years yet to live, would be apt to procrastinate their repentance, and from that delay to take occasion of licentiousness. Our last day is therefore in mercy ordinarily hid from us, to the end that we should every day, and continually, prepare for it. Nor would men be careful to use the due means for the preservation of their health and life, if they knew *terminum vite fatalem*, the fatal period of it.

This, therefore, I am persuaded is not the thing that David here prays for. What then, you will say, doth he pray for? I answer, he prays that God would make him to know in general how short and uncertain man's life here on earth is, that every man must certainly die after a determinate and short number of years expired, being in the mean while uncertain and ignorant of that fatal period.

But, you will say again, doth not every man know as much as this? Yes; but very few consider it. When, therefore, David prays that God would make him to know his end, and the measure of his days, we are to call to mind the known rule of divines:—In scripture, words of knowledge betoken suitable affections. For a man therefore to know his end, and the measure of his days, what it is, or to know how short and uncertain his life is on earth, is for him seriously to consider and lay to heart that great truth, and to live accordingly. This is not what every man doth, though every man ought to do it. In short, therefore, David here in my text prays for the very same thing that Moses doth in his prayer: *So teach us to number our days, that we may*

apply our hearts unto wisdom. (Psalm xc. 12.); i. e. by thy grace enable us to make a just account of the shortness and uncertainty of our life on earth, that so we may wisely apply ourselves to make the best use we can of it, in repenting of our sins, and fitting ourselves for the final absolution. David's measuring of his days is doubtless the same with Moses's numbering his days.

The text being thus, I hope, sufficiently explained, I proceed to raise my observations from it, which shall be these two:

I. I observe, it is a matter of great use and concernment, much conducing to the purposes of religion, for a man to know his end, and the measure of his days, i. e. seriously to consider the shortness and uncertainty of his life here on earth: for you see David in my text makes this the matter of his serious prayer and humble supplication to Almighty God.

II. I observe, a due consideration of the shortness and uncertainty of man's life in this world is the gift of God, and the effect of his grace, which therefore we ought, by prayer, humbly and earnestly to ask of him. So David doth in my text, *Lord make me to know mine end*, &c.

I. I begin with the first observation, viz. this, It is a matter of great use and concernment, much conducing to the purposes of religion, for a man to know his end, and the measure of his days; i. e. seriously to consider the shortness and uncertainty of his life here on earth.

This will appear by shewing you more particularly what it is for a man to know his end, and the measure of his days, or to number his days aright. The very explanation of the nature of this duty, will of itself shew the great use and benefit of it.

For a man then to know the measure of his days, or to number his days aright, is,

I. To understand and consider the shortness and uncertainty of our life in this world, taken absolutely and in itself. The royal prophet excellently expresses this in the verse immediately following my text, *Behold thou hast made my days as an hand-breadth*. An elegant metaphor to set forth the brevity of man's life on earth. It is a very narrow scantling, as it were, but an handful of time and duration.

tion. Many of the sons of Adam find their grave in their mother's womb, and die before they see the sun. Others peep forth into the light, as it were, only to see it, and having, by a shriek or two, given testimony to the misery of this life, presently die and vanish, and their death treads upon the heels of their birth. Others are *ήμεροβιοι* creatures of a day's continuance, and their birth and death are contained within the compass of one rising and setting of the sun. Others live a little longer, but yet die upon their mother's breast. Others outlive their infancy, and having prattled and played a while in the world, death on a sudden surprises them, and puts an end to their childish sport. Others arrive to some growth of stature and understanding, and bud forth, and promise fair, and are the joy and hope of their parents; but on a sudden (like the child of the Shunamitish woman) the sprightly lad falls sick and dies, and leaves the afflicted parents grey hairs to follow, with sorrow, to the grave. Others live to blossom, and arrive to the flower of their age, their youth, but a fever, or some violent accident, snatches them away; the flower on a sudden fades and withers, and they die in the prime of their years. Others reach the middle age, and their mountain appears strong, and the tree seems to have taken deep root, and there is little doubt but the man will live to a good old age: but, behold! death lays his axe to the root of the tree, the firm oak is cut down, falls and dies, and the strong man is taken away in the midst of his days, as David expresseth it. (Psalm cii. 24.) But if the days of our years are seventy, nay, *if by reason of strength they be fourscore years, yet is their strength labour and sorrow, for it is soon cut off, and we flee away*, as Moses expresseth it. (Psalm xc. 10.) Threescore or fourscore years make a great noise, and sound high, and whilst they are before us, they look big, and seem to be a long time of duration. But one year steals away after another, and when the whole term is out, we wonder and are vexed at our false arithmetic; the vast number of years seems as a cipher, and the time that is past appears as a dream, yea a mere nothing.

2. To know the measure of our days, or to number our days aright, is to consider the shortness of our life on earth com-

paratively; and that compared, 1. with God's eternity; 2. compared with our own eternity; 3. compared with the great work and business of our life, the business of religion.

1. To know the measure of our days, is to consider the shortness of this mortal life compared with God's eternity. This is a very humbling and abasing consideration, not only to us mortal men, but even to the angels themselves. And therefore David takes special notice of it in the verse next my text, in these words, *and mine age is as nothing before thee*, i. e. in comparison of thy eternal duration. So Moses, *A thousand years are but as yesterday in thy sight*. (Psalm xc. 4.) Our age is but an hand-breadth in itself; but compared to eternity, it is not an hairs-breadth, yea it is nothing, it bears no proportion.

Eternity! O word of a vast comprehension. How doth this world and the duration of all things therein vanish and disappear at the very naming of thee? It is impossible to use exact propriety of speech in discoursing of this matter; and therefore we must express ourselves as well as we can. Before we were, there was an infinite space of time, which no finite understanding can reach; and when we die and shall be no more in this world, an endless eternity of time (if I may so speak) succeeds and follows, in which infinite duration our poor life on earth intervenes, or comes in as an hand-breadth, the space of a few minutes, as a small isthmus or creek of land between two boundless oceans. In short, our life in this world is but a little point of time interposed between an eternity past and an eternity to come. We may quickly lose ourselves and be swallowed up in this profound consideration, and therefore I pass from it to the next, viz.

2. To number our days aright, is to consider the shortness of our life here, compared with our own eternity hereafter. God is eternal *a parte ante*, and *a parte post*, by an eternity past, (you must still bear with impropriety of speech in this matter,) and by an eternity to come. There was never any point of time wherein he was not; there shall never be any point of time wherein he shall cease to be. And therefore he is styled in scripture *Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending, the Lord, which is, and which*

was, and which is to come. (Rev. i. 8.) But as for ourselves, there was a time when we were not. Our register books will tell us when we began to be and to live. Nay this world, and all things therein, had a beginning, and there was once nothing in existence besides the Almighty God, the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, the blessed Trinity in Unity, which from all eternity enjoyed itself, as being self-sufficient and perfectly happy in itself, nor at all needing any thing without itself, any created being to add to its felicity: for God made not this world for any essential good that should thereby accrue unto himself, (for all things owe all that they are, or have, unto him,) but with a design to communicate his goodness to certain beings without himself, which should therefore depend upon him, and adore and glorify him, as the author and fountain both of their being and well-being.

Upon this design, in that point of time (if I may have leave so to call it) which the all-wise God saw most fit and convenient, the eternal Word and Son of God went forth from the Father, by his almighty power, to create and make heaven and earth, and all things that are therein. For so we read; *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him, and without him was not any thing made that was made.* (John, i. 1, 2, 3.) Of things that God made, some he made only for a temporary use, and to serve the œconomy or dispensation of this present world, as St. Irenæus somewhere expresses it. In this rank are all the beasts that perish, all trees, plants, and vegetables, nay the earth itself, and the heavens as now they are: for all these shall be dissolved, and were made to be dissolved, as the psalmist assures us. *Of old hast thou laid the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the work of thy hands. They shall perish, but thou shalt endure; yea all of them shall wax old like a garment; as a vesture shalt thou change them, and they shall be changed.* (Psalm cii. 25, 26.) But there are other creatures designed for an eternal duration, as the angels, and we men, in that part of us wherein we are allied to the angels, our souls; which, when our bodies die, still live, till by the power of Christ our bodies

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It is impossible for him to be a worldly or wicked man, yea it is impossible but that he should be a very spiritual and holy man, who often and seriously thinks of the shortness of this life, and the eternity of that which is to follow it. O eternity! (may I say again) how surprising, how awakening are the thoughts of thee! Who so stupid, so senseless, as not to feel a trembling in his loins, when this thought comes into his mind—what if I should be lost, and miscarry for ever? And yet this great point depends upon our good or ill behaviour, in that short space of time which is allotted us in this present world; which brings me to the consideration of the shortness of our life, compared with the great work and business of it.

3. To number our days aright, is to consider the shortness of our life here, compared

compared with the main work and business of our life, the business of religion; for which chiefly God sent us into this world, and by which alone we can be fitted and prepared for eternal happiness in the other. It was the complaint of the physician of old, *vita brevis, ars longa*, that the physician's life is short, but his art long and difficult, requiring much time and labour to understand it. The saying, with due explication, may not unfitly be applied to the Christian's life. Our life here is short, but the art of living well, is long, difficult, and hard to be learned. It is true, the just and righteous, the good and merciful God, requires no more of us in order to our eternal happiness hereafter, than what he gives us time and power, opportunity and ability to perform here. But as we through our own folly generally order the matter, our time proves too short for our work. Deduct the time we spend in sleeping, eating, and drinking, which commonly amounts to at least one half of our time; the time required to the necessary works of our calling, the time we spend in recreation, in unnecessary visits and compliments, in idle company, *vel nihil agendo, vel malè agendo*, in doing either nothing, or that which is worse than nothing; and the remainder will appear to be a very slender portion of time; too little (I fear) for the work and business of religion, the main end for which God made us, and sent us into this world.

To improve this argument, we may consider these two things: (1.) That religion is a work, and that a hard and laborious one. (2.) That this great work must be done within the compass of this short uncertain life, or we are undone for ever.

(1.) Religion is a work, and that an hard and laborious one. The whole current of scripture represents it under this notion to us. So much St. Paul signifies when he exhorts us to *work out our salvation with fear and trembling*. (Phil. ii. 12.) So our Saviour, *Labour not for that meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth to everlasting life*. (John, vi. 27.) But the exhortation of our Saviour is most pressing and emphatical: *Strive to enter in at the strait gate; for strait is the gate, and narrow is the way that leadeth unto life, &c.* (Luke, xiii.

24.) The Greek word is *ἀσπάζομαι*, which signifies to *strive*, as wrestlers in the Olympic games. The work of religion therefore is an hard work, which cannot be performed by us without great striving and struggling. Hence the life of a Christian is compared by St. Paul to a wrestling. *Every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown, but we an incorruptible.* (1 Cor. ix. 25.) In the same chapter he compares the Christian's life to a race, (ver. 24.) and to a fight, (ver. 26.) And so he doth where he hath both the similitudes of a combat and a race together: *I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course.* (2 Tim. iv. 7.)

It were an easy matter clearly to demonstrate this truth, by unfolding the particulars of the Christian religion. But my allowance of time being but short, I shall briefly touch only on one, which is indeed the sum of all the rest, and that is, the work of mortification. That this is a necessary act of Christian religion, appears, because it is expressly required of every Christian. *Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth, fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, &c.* (Col. iii. 5.) Yea that it is required of us *sub periculo anime*, as we hope for salvation, and to escape the wrath to come, we are plainly told, *For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die; but if ye through the spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live.* (Rom. viii. 13.)

Now that this act of religion is a great and laborious work, will soon appear to him that considers what it is. It is to die unto sin, and to live unto righteousness; to put off those affections which are natural to us, or are rivetted in us by long custom, which is *altera natura*, a second nature; to change the whole frame of our dispositions and actions, and to become quite other men than formerly we were. This certainly must be *opus laboriosum & assiduum*, a long and laborious work.

It is true, Christ saith that *his yoke is easy, and his burthen light*. But to whom? To minds duly disposed to receive it. It is agreeable to our right reason and understanding, and therefore easy to him who is under the government of reason, when raised above his sensual appetites and affections by the grace of God. It is an easy yoke, if it were put on betimes, before

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before evil dispositions and habits be contracted. It will at length be easy to every man, that takes it upon him by use and exercise, and the grace of God. But to men corrupted and vitiated by evil habits and customs, which is the case of most men, before they undertake the yoke of Christ, it is no such easy thing; it is some time before it comes to sit evenly and smoothly upon their necks. Nay to men that have gone on in a very long course and custom of sinning, the yoke of Christ is next to impossible to be born. So God himself tells us by the prophet Jeremiah: *Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? Then may ye also do good who are accustomed to do evil.* (Chap. xiii. 23.) I shall make this plain by some instances.

Temperance is an easy, yea most delightful virtue; it is agreeable to the reason of man, it preserves the faculties of his soul in their vigour, it conduces to that health of body which is the greatest outward blessing. Yet the habitual glutton or drunkard can sooner die than be temperate in his meat or drink. What more easy, than for a man that is able, to give alms to the indigent and necessitous? What more God-like, or delightful virtue, than for a man to see the poor and miserable living upon, and rejoicing in his bounty? But from the man who hath given himself to covetousness and the love of money, every alms comes as hardly as if it were a drop of blood from his heart. What more pleasant when good men meet together than freely to discourse of divine matters? But such discourse grates the ears of the carnal man. What more noble pleasure to a generous soul, than the meditation and contemplation of heavenly things? But set a sensual man to this work, and how unpleasant and tedious will it seem to him? What greater pleasure, what greater privilege to a soul duly disposed, than frequent converse with God in prayer? When he is oppressed with the cares and troubles of this life, when he is tired with the vanities of the world, what ease and satisfaction doth he find in unburdening his soul, and having recourse to his God? But to the man immersed in worldly cares or pleasures, prayer is *opus alienum*, a strange work, a disagreeable and unpleasant exercise; he is hardly drawn to it, he is frigid and dull in it, he is glad

when he is rid of it. The like I might shew you in other instances.

Again, Christ's yoke is easy, if taken together with the reward attending it. If we consider the infinite endless bliss and happiness, wherewith our short and slender service of our blessed Lord in this life shall be recompenced hereafter, all that he requires of us will appear to be a very easy condition, and indeed a very light yoke and burden. In this sense, all the afflictions of this life, the bearing whereof is the hardest part of the Christian duty, are said to be light: *For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.* (2 Cor. iv. 17.) And the same apostle again tells us, *For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.* (Rom. viii. 18.)

Nay, I may go yet farther, and affirm, that the law of Christ is an easy yoke, compared with the yoke of sin and Satan. The drudgery of the sinner in the service of sin, is greater than the labour of the good man in the service of Christ, as I could easily demonstrate, if it were not too great a digression. It is a certain truth, that wicked men generally undergo more pain and difficulty in going to hell than good men do in getting to heaven. In these senses we grant that Christ's yoke is easy, and his burden light.

But they who think that Christianity is an easy thing in this sense, that it complies with their carnal ease, sloth, and negligence, are under a very gross and dangerous mistake. Indeed as these men have represented the Christian religion, to themselves it is easy enough. If to talk of religion, and to make a shew of it, were religion; if it were sufficient to perform some external acts of religion, as going to church when we have nothing else to do, or at those times when we are allowed to do any thing else; if praying now and then when we are in a good humour; if abstinence from some grosser and more infamous vices might serve the turn, these men were not much mistaken. But this is a very false notion of Christianity. The Christian's duty is a work and labour, and that of great difficulty, a labour of the heart, as being employed chiefly in setting the heart aright, in renewing the inward man, in changing our very na-
tures

tures and dispositions, and in a word, in new moulding our souls to an holy and divine frame and temper, such as the gospel of Christ sets before us.

So much of the first consideration, that our religion is a great and difficult work, a work of time and labour.

(2.) We are to consider that this great work must be done within the compass of this short uncertain life, or we are undone for ever. We should do well often to call to mind the weighty words of our Saviour, *The night cometh* (i. e. the night of death) *when no man can work.* (John, ix. 4.) This is the night, as St. Austin speaks, wherein no man can work, but every man shall receive according to what he hath wrought. To believe in Christ, to repent, to do the works of righteousness, to exercise acts of piety and mercy, in order to our acceptance with God, are works proper to the season of this life; when this life is past, the season is gone, and there is no more place for them for ever. Our blessed Saviour plainly teacheth us this in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus the beggar, (Luke, xvi.) where he gives us an account but of two sorts of men, the good and the wicked man, and assures us, that presently after death there is a vast gulf fixed between the places or states wherein they are, so that the one cannot pass unto the other; that is, the good man after death can never become miserable, nor the wicked man happy: *Between us and you there is a great gulf fixed; so that they that would pass from hence to you cannot; neither can they pass to us that would come from thence.* (Ver. 26.) In the same state wherein we die, we must continue to all eternity. There is no after-game to be played in this case.

The doctrine of purgatory, taught in the church of Rome, is a vile cheat, that hath no foundation at all, either in scripture, or in the belief of the primitive church, yea, is plainly contrary to both. Wherefore as we love our souls, let us not in the least depend upon it. Let us fix this as a most infallible conclusion, that if death seize upon us, before we have repented with a true repentance proceeding from the love of God above all things, there is no hope, no redemption for us. Then neither our own prayers, nor the tears of others, will do us any good. All dirges and masses for our souls will then

be insignificant. All the powers in heaven and earth cannot then help us. Nay our blessed Saviour himself cannot save us, because he hath positively declared he will not. *Behold, now* (whilst we live under the means of grace) *is the accepted time; now is the day of salvation.* (2 Cor. vi. 2.)

O! that this consideration might enter deeply into our hearts! and that it may so do, let us often direct our thoughts to those wretched miserable souls, that are now in chains of darkness, irrevocably lost and undone for ever. How do they curse their own folly, in neglecting those opportunities of salvation which we enjoy, and they once had, but are now for ever denied? How many worlds, were they in their power, would they give to be where we are, in the house of God, to hear the promises of salvation offered to them, and to call upon God for mercy? How carefully would they frequent the prayers of the church? How fervent would they be in those prayers? How often would they be upon their bended knees in private prayer? How greedily would they embrace all opportunities of salvation when offered to them, every sacrament they could receive, every sermon they could hear? But, alas! their time is past, and they are excluded from the means of grace and salvation to all eternity. Now be assured, that if thou dost not seasonably repent, and turn to God, thy case will very shortly (God knows how soon) be the same with theirs, and thou shalt repent in hell, for not repenting here.

I have done with my first observation, which was this: It is a matter of great use and concernment, mightily conducing to the purposes of religion, for a man to know his end, and the number of his days, what it is, i. e. seriously to consider the shortness and uncertainty of his life here on earth.

I have shewn you, that to know the measure of our days, or to number our days aright, is to consider seriously the shortness of our life, 1. Absolutely and in itself; 2. Comparatively; and that 1. as compared with God's eternity; 2. as compared with our own eternity; 3. as compared with the main work and business of our life, the business of religion.

I pass now to the other observation, which I shall but briefly touch upon, and so conclude. It is this:

II. A due consideration of the shortness and uncertainty of man's life in this world, is a gift of God, and the effect of his grace, which therefore we ought, by prayer, humbly and earnestly to ask of him.

So David doth in my text : *Lord, make me to know mine end, and the measure of my days, &c.* One would think this were a needless prayer; for who knows not that he must die, and that the time of his death is uncertain, and yet certainly not far off? And who so brutish as not to consider this? But he must shut his eyes and never look abroad into the world, that sees not the necessity of this prayer. A spirit of slumber and sottishness is fallen upon the generality of men, so that they seldom or never seriously think of that which so much concerns them. They see many of all ages fall into their graves round about them, and yet they live as if they themselves should never die.

The lesson of our mortality, divine Providence doth every day, yea, every hour and minute, press and inculcate on us, and, as it were, beat into us. The funeral bell ever and anon rings in our ears, and we daily tread upon the graves of others. Many of us already find the harbingers of death within us, we all see the triumphs of death without us, and (as our church expresseth it) *in the midst of life we are in death*. Alas! that among so many remembrancers wherewith Providence hath surrounded us, we should, with that monarch in story, need yet another monitor to tell us every day, Remember that thou art mortal. Yet this is our case. What fatal stupidity is it that hath seized on us? Hath the frequency of these admonitions made them to lose their force and virtue on us? Are we become like sextons or grave-diggers, that by living, as it were, in the charnel-house, and daily conversing with the bones and skulls of dead men, at last become hardened, and of all mortals are the least apprehensive of their mortality? Or rather, are we affectedly ignorant, and do we wilfully put the evil day far from us? Whatever the cause be, the effect is sadly visible.

So that every one of us hath reason to pray with David, *Lord, make me to know mine end, and the measure of my days, what it is, that I may know how frail I am; and with Moses, So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts*

unto wisdom. We have reason to pray, that God would never suffer us to fall into the folly of the blinded and infatuated world, who never entertain any serious thoughts of death and judgment, of heaven and hell, till death surprises them, till judgment arrests them, till heaven's gates be finally shut against them, and hell swallows them up.

From this infatuation God of his infinite mercy deliver us, through the merits of his only Son Jesus Christ our Lord.

To whom with the Father, and the Holy Ghost, be ascribed all honour and glory, all adoration and worship, both now and for evermore, Amen.

SERMON CXLIII.

The Folly of glorying in Wisdom, Might, or Riches,

JEREMIAH, ix. 23, 24.

Thus saith the Lord, Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might; let not the rich man glory in his riches. But let him that glorieth, glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me, that I am the Lord, which exercise loving kindness, judgment, and righteousness, in the earth, for in these things I delight, saith the Lord.

IT is generally agreed, by the best interpreters, that my text hath reference to the preceding verses, even from the beginning of this chapter; wherein the holy prophet predicts and foretels things so direful to God's people, and that with so feeling a sense of them, that he himself seems to have suffered little less in the prophecy than they should in the event of it. He begins, ver. 1, thus: *O, that my head were waters, and mine eyes a fountain of tears, that I might weep day and night for the slain of the daughter of my people*. As if he had said, I think I can never grieve sufficiently for the dismal slaughter and destruction which I foresee will shortly befall the People of the Jews. My people, i. e. my dear countrymen, the people to whom God hath sent me as his prophet, the people whom I affectionately love, and whose welfare I wish as much as, yea much more, than mine own.

In the following verses, he most elegantly and pathetically describes both the great sins of the Jews, the causes of God's judgments, and the judgments themselves that

that should come upon them for those sins; one while sadly reflecting on the one, and then, with a no less passion of sorrow, passing to the other.

And, after all, as well knowing the obdurate and stubborn temper of the Jews, that they would be apt to slight even this dreadful prophecy of his, and fancy that they might escape the threatened destruction, either by their policy and cunning, or by their power and strength, or by their wealth and riches; he, or rather the Divine Spirit in him, seasonably obviates and meets with this vain conceit of theirs in the words of my text: *Thus saith the Lord, Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might; let not the rich man glory in his riches. But let him that glorieth, glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me, that I am the Lord, which exercise loving kindness, judgment, and righteousness, in the earth, for in these things I delight, saith the Lord.* As if he had said, This calamity, which I predict, no wisdom of yours can prevent, no power or strength of yours shall be able to resist, nor are all your riches and treasures sufficient to redeem you from it; and therefore trust not in any or all of these, but make God your refuge, who only can save you from the evils threatened, or preserve you under them.

This is the connexion of my text with what went before in this chapter; I shall now immediately betake myself to the text itself, which I shall first carefully explain, and then raise my observations upon it.

And, first, for the explanation, *Thus saith the Lord.* A solemn preface of God's holy prophets, to conciliate authority and to excite the reverent attention of their hearers to what they are about to say; and it always leads the way to something of great weight and moment following, such as is the matter of my text: and accordingly let me bespeak, yea in the name of God command and challenge, the awful attention of all that hear me this day, from the greatest to the least; for it is not I say it, but, *Thus saith the Lord, Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might; let not the rich man glory in his riches, &c.*

Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom. By wisdom may be understood all that

knowledge universally which may seem any way perfective of the mind of man, besides the saving knowledge of God; but by the context we are led to that wisdom especially which we call prudence, and hath respect to the actions and affairs of human life, and consists in a due contrivance and disposition of means, in order to the avoiding the evils we fear, and the attaining the good things we desire, in this world.

Neither let the mighty man glory in his might. By might, most interpreters understand bodily strength or valour; and accordingly the Chaldee paraphrast on my text brings the example of Solomon, the wisest of all men, falling from God's favour, to dissuade us from trusting in our own wisdom; the example of Sampson, the strongest of men, to shew us the vanity of bodily strength; and the instance of Ahab, the richest of the kings of Israel, to deter us from confiding in our wealth and riches; of which also Solomon, king both of Judea and Israel, was a greater instance.

And yet, methinks, the might here spoken of may be extended farther, even to all that power and interest whatsoever which a man hath or is able to make in this world. Let a man be never so mighty and powerful, either in his own strength and valour, or in his friends and dependents on him, or otherwise, yet he is a fool, if he presumptuously glories in this his might and power, as if it could be his security and protection without the favour of God. What is meant by the rich man and riches I need not tell you; but what is it for a man to glory either in his wisdom, or in his might, or in his riches? In the Hebrew it is לֹא יִתְהַלֵּל - let him not praise himself; which the Seventy translate, as we do, μὴ καυχᾶσθω, let him not glory, though elsewhere they themselves render the verb by the Greek ἀγαλλίασθαι, greatly to rejoice. The word undoubtedly signifies any mighty complacence, delight, and satisfaction, in a thing; but here, by the context, it is confined to such a delight and satisfaction in a thing as is accompanied with a trust and confidence in it as our greatest felicity, safety, and security. *Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, i. e.* Let him not confide or depend on it, as that which will bear him out in the time of danger

danger and distress; and so in the rest. *But let him that glorieth, glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me;* which words Grotius thus paraphraseth, Let him trust on this, that he knoweth me, to wit, so as to express this his knowledge of me in his life and actions.

That I am the Lord, which exercise loving kindness, judgment, and righteousness, in the earth. Where Grotius again observes, that it is not said, that he knoweth me according to my nature and essence, for so no man, in this life at least, can know God, but that he knoweth me *which exercise loving kindness, judgment, and righteousness;* i. e. according to those properties and attributes, whereby I have made myself known to men, in my word and works; such as loving kindness and goodness, justice and a perfect *ἀρετή* rectitude or righteousness in all my dealings towards the sons of men. The same Grotius farther notes it as remarkable, that it is added *in the earth*, to meet with the vain and wicked conceit of those, who held that God's providence extends not to sublunary things, to things on earth, but is employed solely and wholly in the disposal of heavenly things above us; all things here below being left to the determination either of blind chance or fatal necessity, arising from an inseparable chain of causes, linked together in the first creation of things: in opposition to which impious imagination, God himself by his prophet assures us, that we are to know him as a God that *exerciseth loving kindness, judgment, and righteousness, in the earth;* which the divine psalmist also more fully and distinctly expresseth; *Who is like unto the Lord our God, who dwelleth on high, who humbleth himself to behold the things that are in heaven and in the earth?* (Psal. cxiii. 5, 6.)

The plain sense of the whole text, in short, is this: Instead of glorying or trusting in our own wisdom, power, or wealth, as the men of the world use to do, we are to know and assuredly to believe, that all the actions and concerns of men on earth are governed and disposed of by the providence of God; whom therefore we ought humbly to acknowledge, faithfully to serve and obey, and on him stedfastly to trust and depend, in the whole course of our lives, this being our best and indeed only security. So that the prophet delivers the same thing

here, which Solomon doth, *Trust in the Lord with all thine heart. In all thy ways acknowledge him. Fear the Lord and depart from evil.* (Prov. iii. 5, 6, 7.)

The whole scope of the text, thus explained, is comprised in these two observations:

I. It is a very sinful and vain thing for any man so to glory in his own wisdom, strength, or wealth, as to place his trust or confidence in either of them.

II. The religious acknowledgment of God's providence, in the wise and righteous government and disposal of all human affairs, joined with an humble dependance and firm trust on him, in the way of obedience to him, is man's best and indeed only security.

And first, It is a very vain and sinful thing for any man so to glory in his own wisdom, strength, or wealth, as to place his trust and confidence in either or all of them.

Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might, &c. i. e. Let not any man so glory in either of these, as to confide and trust in them, without a due regard to God's providence in the government of things; for these, severally and jointly, are very weak and vain props for a man to build and rely upon. I shall pursue the proposition in the several parts.

(1.) *Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom.* This indeed is the most natural pride of man. It was the contempt of that simple innocence, wherein God created our first parents, and their affection of I know not what knowledge and wisdom beside and beyond it, that was their ruin in paradise. And the sons of fallen man are generally apt to think, that they possess indeed that wisdom which their first parents vainly coveted and aspired to.

Wisdom is the idol that sinful man chiefly adores and worships; with the mere shadow of this he is pleased, upon this especially he values himself, and the very conceit of this puffs him up with pride and self-confidence; he can more contentedly be stripped of all his other vain-glories than want the reputation of this.

Hence (as one well observes) though there have been some found, not only contented with, but even glorying in the name of irreligious, yea in being accounted

counted atheists, and wholly void of all religion; yet scarce any have been known willing to bear the character of foolish and unwise, and the reproach of knave in the corrupt world is esteemed less ignominious than that of fool: and even of those who have some relish of virtue and goodness in them, how few are there that either indeed do, or would be thought to do, any thing in favour thereof, which might, in the least degree, impeach the credit of their wisdom in the esteem of the foolish world! So fain would all be accounted, though very few in truth are, wise; the main reason of which seems to be this, that whereas the want of wisdom imports impotence and inability, irreligion and immorality are by election and free choice.

Now the pride of man, if God's grace correct it not, makes him more impatient of any want that argues him to be naturally weak and impotent, than of a moral defect, proceeding from his own free election and choice of will; and hence it is that many boast of things craftily done by them for some particular advantage, which they know to be evil and unlawful; thus glorying in their wit, whilst they are not at all ashamed of their wickedness. In a word, every man would be wise and be thought so too, and most men think themselves really to be so; and those few mortals that are wise indeed, in comparison to the rest, if they have not the fear of God joined with their wisdom, are infallibly proud of it, and glory in it, and trust to their own counsels, without due regard to the divine wisdom and providence, the only sure and safe guide amidst the infinite uncertainties and perplexities of human life.

Now how perfectly vain this glorying and trust of man in his own wisdom is, will appear (to omit many others) by these few following considerations:

1. Consider that the wisest of men many times most grossly mistake their measures, and, as if they were infatuated by some destiny, do the most foolish things. It is almost proverbial, That there is nothing so foolishly said, but some wise man hath said the same; and it is as certain, that there is no action so foolishly done, but that the examples of wise men may be alleged to patronize the folly of it. Solomon, the wisest not only of kings, but of all mere mortals, may yet

be observed to have committed as gross incongruities, both in public government and private conversation, as any the most unadvised prince or man was ever guilty of.

2. Consider that wise men are apt, as to be confident of, so to be secure in their own wisdom, and to despise those that are beneath them in that faculty as mere fools, and thereupon to grow careless, and to lay themselves open to those, who, though they have less wit, yet have many times more vigilance, who watch and often meet with an opportunity of getting their advantage of them.

3. Consider, how many secret lurking contingencies and chances there are in the course of human affairs, which no sagacity or wisdom of man can foresee or provide against, one of which suddenly happening, may utterly defeat and frustrate the best-laid design and contrivance of the wisest man; and when such a chance happens, the wisest man is forced to speak in the language of the fool, *non putaram*. Experience tells us this, and it were easy to give you many notable instances of it out of history, if the time would permit.

4. Consider that every man's life lies at God's mercy and absolute disposal, who can, and often doth, by a sudden death, snap off the designing man, just as his design is growing to maturity; thereby dashing the whole frame of his plot and machination in pieces. This the divine psalmist takes notice of in princes and great men; *Put not your trust in princes and great men, nor in the son of man, in whom there is no help; his breath goeth forth, he returneth to his earth: In that very day his thoughts perish.* (Psal. cxlvi. 3, 4.)

The designs and contrivances of great and wise men are altogether as uncertain as the breath they live by; that breath is on a sudden gone, and all their wisest counsels cease and perish with it. Man plots and designs, and says within himself, this and that and the other great matter, he will do hereafter; but, behold! divine Providence cuts him short, by cutting off his life on a sudden, and all his designs together with it.

5. And lastly, Consider that God professedly sets himself to oppose the proud man, that glories in his own wisdom, to baffle his wisdom, and to turn it into folly, to cross and frustrate his designs and

and contrivances, and to bring his counsels to nought. It is a sad sentence to these men, which St. James hath, chap. iv. ver. 6, and St. Peter, in his First Epistle, chap. v. ver. 5, *God resisteth*, sets himself as it were in battle array, to fight with *the proud*. Indeed the proud man is an invader of the divine glory, challenging that to himself which is God's; and against invasion force useth to be opposed. Now who can stand against the divine force and power? What wisdom is able to countermin the divine wisdom? How easily, and how many thousand ways, can the almighty and the all-wise God confound the greatest politician!

These considerations are sufficient to shew the great sin, vanity, and folly, of trusting to a man's own wisdom, without regard to the providence of God in the government of things, and the necessity of following the wise man's advice: *Trust in the Lord with all thine heart, and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths. Be not wise in thine own eyes; fear the Lord, and depart from evil.* (Prov. iii. 5, 6, 7.) I proceed to the second part of the first observation.

(2.) *Let not the mighty man glory in his might.* Whether by that we understand might and strength of body, or a mighty interest in the world, or both. First, for bodily might and strength, men are generally apt to presume on it. The athletic man, he that enjoys a firm and robust constitution of body, seldom or never thinks of sickness, much less of death, as in any nearness of approach to him. He is upon the matter sure of a long life, and in this confidence (which is the greatest mischief) puts off and delays his repentance, giving himself up to vain and sinful pleasures and delights, and thinking it time enough many years hence to be serious and religious. This is a perfect vanity; for our own daily experience furnishes us with examples of the strongest men suddenly assaulted with weakness and sickness, and sinking under the burthen of it into their graves, into dust and rottenness.

The man whom we see brisk and lively to-day, so that we admire and perhaps envy his health, within a few days hence we may hear sad news of; that he is either sick, or dying, or dead; and from being the object of admiration and envy;

become on a sudden the object of our pity, grief, and sorrow. And it is a common observation, that many valetudinarians, many sickly persons, that scarce ever in their lives knew what health was, have yet outlived and trod upon the graves of those who have enjoyed it in the greatest perfection. These very frequently, either by a fever suddenly kindled in their blood or spirits, or by a surfeit taken in confidence of their strength to bear strong drink, or to digest the greatest load of meat; or by a fall, or some surprising accident, posting to the gates of death; to which the other march by the slow and leisurely paces of a long and lingering infirmity. Indeed, God himself delights to shew his strength in man's weakness, and his strength against man's strength; to teach us that we should not despond in the former, nor depend and trust in the latter.

There are others that glory in their bodily strength as their great and sure defence against their enemies; and indeed in confidence of this create enemies to themselves, braving and affronting all they meet with. But these persons generally at last meet with their match, yea are over-matched: some of them fall as victims or beasts sacrificed to Bacchus, by a quarrel commenced in a drunken assembly: others die in the field, when they are neither drunk nor sober, by the sword of a private enemy, or perhaps a friend whom they would needs make their enemy, and are left there as pitiful spectacles of grinning honour; and most of them come to an unfortunate and untimely end.

But if by might we understand a great and mighty interest and power in the world; to trust in this is every whit as vain as our confidence in the former: for how often doth almighty God *shew strength with his arm, scattering the proud in the imagination of their hearts, and putting down the mighty from their seats?* as it is excellently expressed in the Magnificat, or song of the blessed Virgin. (Luke, i. 51.) How many examples doth history, yea our own age and observation, supply us with, of great and mighty men meeting with as great falls, and falling into the greatest ruin? But I shall not insist on this, as being a subject not so fit for this congregation. Only I shall make bold to send all great and mighty

mighty men that trust in their power and greatness, without a due dependance on divine Providence, to take advice and learn from a woman, but yet a woman divinely inspired and delivering the oracles of the great God : her name is Hannah, who, almost in the words of my text, thus bespeaks all the great men of the world : *Talk no more so exceedingly proud ; let not arrogancy come out of your mouth ; for the Lord is a God of knowledge, and by his actions are weighed. The bows of the mighty men are broken, and they that stumbled are girt with strength. — The Lord maketh poor, and maketh rich ; he bringeth low, and lifteth up ; he raiseth up the poor out of the dust, and lifteth up the beggar from the dunghill, to set them among princes, and to make them inherit the throne of glory : for the pillars of the earth are the Lord's, and he hath set the world upon them. He will keep the feet of his saints, and the wicked shall be silent in darkness ; for by strength shall no man prevail.* (1 Sam. ii. 3, 4, 7, 8, 9.) And so I pass to the third and last branch of my first observation.

(3.) *Let not the rich man glory in his riches ; let him not trust in these.* This indeed is the greatest prop that the carnal and worldly man is apt to rely on : this is the rock and fortress, the tower and castle to which, upon all occasions and in the greatest exigencies, he hath recourse and flies ; and here, if anywhere, he promiseth himself safety.

The wise man thinks this the most necessary tool and instrument to work his designs by, and despairs of doing any great matters without it. The mighty and powerful man believes his chiefest strength and interest to lie in his wealth ; a rich exchequer being accounted the surest support of the greatest monarch. And, in a word, among all ranks and degrees of men this is held for a maxim :

Quantum quisque sua, &c.

The greater riches, the greater reputation and credit in the world.

Hence the wisest of men, Solomon, tells us, that *money answers all things*, (Ecclesiastes, x. 19.) i. e. it answers all the designs, desires, and necessities of men. This indeed is the saying of the wisest of men ; but yet this saying is to be taken *cum grano salis*, with a grain of wisdom ; the same which the Wise Man gives us in the same book, *Wisdom is good*

with an inheritance, and by it there is profit to them that see the sun. For wisdom is a defence, and money is a defence, but the excellency of knowledge is, that it giveth life to them that have it. (Eccles. vii. 11, 12.) Wisdom and wealth, a good soul and a good estate, are fitly matched together. For,

Haud facile emergunt, &c.

The greatest virtues are oppressed by poverty.

Drusius on the text gives us a proverb of the Hebrews, *The law is good with the way of the earth.* The law, that is, the study of the law, true piety, is good with the way of the earth ; i. e. with some advantage that may afford a man a liberal and useful subsistence in this world : for the poor man cannot always, and in all circumstances, make use of his wisdom ; or, if he can use it, he wants authority ; men generally regarding not what is spoken, but who speaks ; and there being a great difference between the same saying or action when spoken by a rich man in credit and reputation, and a poor despised person. But yet so excellent is true wisdom, that itself alone gives life to the owner of it ; i. e. a comfortable life, a long life, (when Providence sees it good,) yea life eternal. But an inheritance without wisdom is a sorry possession, and really a very poverty. Wealth separated from piety is a most vain thing, and it is the greatest folly to trust in it.

But perhaps the text may be otherwise interpreted, by understanding the wisdom spoken of in the first place of secular or worldly wisdom ; and the knowledge last mentioned, of the only true knowledge and wisdom which the same Wise Man often tells us, consists in the fear of God and sincere piety and religion ; and then the words are to be thus paraphrased :

Wisdom is good with an inheritance, for wisdom is a defence, and money is a defence, &c. i. e. worldly wisdom and worldly wealth are seemingly a strong security and fence to the man that hath them both together. But indeed neither the one nor the other severally, nor both together united, are to be depended on ; that wisdom and understanding which consists in the fear of God being man's chiefest, yea only security and felicity ; that alone which gives him life, i. e.

makes his life safe and comfortable here, and brings him perfect peace and happiness hereafter. This is a plain comment on my text: *Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom; let not the rich man glory in his riches; but let him that glorieth, glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me, &c.* However, this is certain, that wealth and riches are very vain things to be gloried and trusted in as a man's chief security and felicity. For,

1. Riches reach only to the outward man, and cannot cure the inward evils and diseases of the mind. What doth all the wealth of the world signify to the man that is naturally and incurably melancholy, that dwells in a continual cloud, and looks on all the brighter things without him through a black glass and a thick mist of darkness? Besides, if some accidental discontent seize upon the rich man, (and the richest men are not out of the reach of such discontents,) how doth this sour all his enjoyments and delights, and render him inwardly most miserable in the midst of all his outward happiness? How apt is every real or imaginary affront from his inferiors, that are either indeed so, or thought so by him, to disquiet and disturb him? How was Haman vexed in the midst of all his glory for want only of a bow from Mordecai? (Esth. iii. 5.) Ahab, the richest of the kings of Israel, having taken a fancy to Naboth's vineyard, and being denied it, *was heavy and displeased*, and took his bed upon it, and could not sleep and would not eat. (1 Kings, xxi. 4.) We are often infinitely mistaken, and take the falsest measures, when we envy the happiness of rich and great men; we know not the inward canker that eats out all their joy and delight, and makes them really much more miserable than ourselves.

But what if a troubled conscience assaults the rich man? and from this danger he is not free, nay to this he is of all others most subject; for riches are styled by our blessed Lord, *the mammon of unrighteousness* (Luke, xvi. 9.): because they are for the most part found in the hands of unrighteous men, and by them are most valued, as being the mammon they serve and honour more than God; and also because they are often gotten by unrighteous means, and generally used

to unrighteous purposes, being made the instruments of sin and ministers to luxury and wantonness. Now, I say, what if all the wickedness he is guilty of in the getting or using of his wealth happen to stare in the face of the rich man's conscience, when awakened by sickness or any other affliction, how doth this affright him, and into what horrors doth it cast him?

2. Riches cannot cure all the evils and diseases of the body neither. One sharp fit of the gout, stone, or strangury, will overcome all the cordial power of gold and silver, and make a man despise his riches, and willing to part with his beloved money for that ease which the vilest beggar enjoys. But this will not always do; money may procure the physician, but oftentimes the physician cannot cure the disease; and the rich man is left to roar under his torment, or miserably to languish under his infirmity, whilst the poor man sings and rejoices in his ease and health. Besides, I take it for certain, that, if not the poor, yet the meaner man hath great advantages in point of health above the rich: for that temperance and plainer fare and exercise of body to which the condition of his life necessitates the man of a lower fortune, is in truth the best physic, and that which, after a tedious and costly course, the physician himself oftentimes adviseth his rich patient to.

3. Riches are no security against outward accidents and contingencies. God hath placed man in this world in the midst of many hazards and evil chances, which fall not under any certain rule but that of divine foresight and providence. To these the rich man is as liable as the poorest beggar. A tile or stone may as soon fall on and crush the rich man's head as the vilest peasant's: the rich man stands on no better legs, and hath no other arms than the poor man; and he may and as often doth need the surgeon to cure his broken leg or arm. He that is clothed in purple is thereby no more secured from a sudden blast of lightning than a man in rags. In the time of war and public calamity the rich man generally fares the worst of all, and is exposed to plunder, rapine, and violence; whilst the meaner man is overlooked, and his obscurity is his greatest security and safety.

4. Riches are themselves uncertain, and therefore not to be gloried and trusted in: for what a folly is it for a man to be secure and confident in that, of the possession of which he can never be secure? Hence the great apostle gives it as a proper advice to rich men, *not to trust in the uncertainty of riches, or in uncertain riches.* And of riches the wisest of men thus elegantly discourseth; *Labour not to be rich; cease from thine own wisdom. Wilt thou set thine eyes upon that which is not? for riches certainly make themselves wings, they fly as an eagle toward heaven.* (Proverbs, xxiii. 4, 5.) Riches are as volatile a thing as the bird of the air, nowhere fixed, uncertain in the getting and keeping; flying from us both when we grasp after them and seek them, and when we think we have them in sure possession. Many are the projects of men to get riches, and some of them are so probable, so likely to take, and come so near the desired effect, that the man thinks himself as secure of them as if he had them already in his power: but by some unexpected accident the project fails, and the man is left as poor as before; yea much poorer and more miserable, as being fallen from a great expectation, and afflicted with the loss of that which, though he never had, yet he was in his own conceit as sure of as if he had possessed it.

And when a man hath gotten wealth, how uncertain is the keeping of it? How often doth the bird fly away on a sudden? Riches are uncertain, as being subject to many chances; to theft, and fraud, and rapine, and violence, and fire and water too; a few great wrecks at sea often undoing the richest merchant. Besides men generally seek after wealth, not so much for their own comfortable subsistence whilst they live, (for a little will suffice for that,) as for the raising of a family, and leaving a rich and flourishing posterity behind them when they are dead. But, alas! how vain is this design? Hear the royal psalmist, *Surely every man walketh in a vain shew: surely they are disquieted in vain: he heapeth up riches, and knoweth not who shall gather them.* (Psal. xxxix. 6.) The provident man hath commonly a wasting prodigal, and the wise man a fool, for his heir. And very often the heir utterly fails, and the family is extinct, and the

name of it is perished from the earth, and the wealth gone to strangers that are no way related to the first gatherer of it.

But if the family be still in being, yet oftentimes the riches are fled and the estate is gone. How many great estates may we reckon up that have, within the compass of one age, shifted several families? A good many years ago such a lordship was in such a family (and perhaps their escutcheon is still to be seen in the wall or windows of the mansion-house, as a sad monument of decayed and ruined gentility); afterwards it went to another; and now it is in a third or fourth family; and whither it will go next who can tell? so vain a thing is it for a man to promise himself that he shall convey his inheritance to his heirs for ever. It is an excellent admonition to this purpose that David gives to those *that trust in their wealth, and boast themselves in the multitude of their riches,—For he seeth that wise men die, likewise the fool and the brutish person perish and leave their wealth to others; their inward thought is, that their houses shall continue for ever, and their dwelling places to all generations; they call their lands after their own names. Nevertheless, man being in honour, abideth not, he is like the beasts that perish.* (Psal. xlix. 10, 11, 12.) The sense of which place seems to be this:

The rich man that trusteth in his riches seeth, or may see, that the wise man and the fool certainly die, the one as well as the other; and that the wisest man by all his wisdom cannot so secure the estate he hath gotten to his own progeny, but that it may, and often doth in a short time pass to another family. And yet such is the folly of the worldling that he promises himself a perpetual name in the world, and a never-failing and always flourishing posterity. But indeed, as the richest and most honourable man must himself certainly die and have his own honour laid in the dust, so the honour of his house, family, and posterity, generally lasts not long, but is also in a little tract of time buried in oblivion.

5. And lastly, Riches will certainly fail, leave, and forsake, the owners of them at last, when they come to die.

If riches could for the present cure all the evils of our minds and bodies; if they could secure us against all outward

accidents in this world, if we were sure of them for our lives, nay and that they should continue to our posterity; yet were it a vain thing to trust in them, as our security and happiness. For we ourselves must certainly after a few years bid an eternal farewell to them, and we must die and for ever leave them. This is the meditation of David in the above-mentioned psalm: *Be not thou afraid when one is made rich, when the glory of his house is increased; for when he dieth he shall carry nothing away, his glory shall not descend after him.* (Psalm xlix. 16, 17.) Now what a contemptible, or rather pitiful object is the rich man when he comes to die, if then he hath nothing else but his riches to trust in? Such an one dies with far greater regret and torment of mind, and is so much more miserable in his death than the poorest man. He is now for ever to leave all his wealth, together with all that pomp and grandeur, all those delights and pleasures that it afforded, and his body to be laid in the dark and silent grave; and as for his soul, (as little religion as he formerly had, yet) he is now uncertain at least what will become of it; but he is certain that if there be any place of misery for wicked souls, thither he must go. But on the other side, the poor man hath no such temptation to make him fond of living or unwilling to die, but may rather look on death as a writ of ease, given him by Providence from a life of sorrow and labour.

But see the stupidity and infatuation of fallen man! The rich man knows he must certainly die as well as others, and that the time of his death is altogether so uncertain that, for ought he can tell, the next day or hour may be his last. He knows that whenever he dies he must infallibly leave his wealth behind him, and carry none of his riches along with him. And to us that live under the revelation of the gospel, God hath given so full a demonstration of a life to come, wherein they shall be for ever happy that despise this world; and they miserable that doat upon it, that it seems almost impossible for any rational man, that duly and impartially weighs the evidence given him, to doubt of it; and yet the rich man still depends on and glories in his riches. Whereas if he did but reflect on the perfect vanity of his

actions in so doing, and seriously consider with himself how foolish and imprudent he therein is, he would heartily subscribe to the truth of the second observation I proposed to discourse of, viz. That the religious acknowledgment of God's providence in the wise and righteous government and disposal of all human affairs, joined with an humble dependance and firm trust on him, is man's best, and indeed only security. But I shall reserve this subject to another opportunity.

Now to God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, be given and ascribed all honour and glory, all religious worship and adoration, now and for evermore. Amen.

SERMON CXLIV.

Man's Dependance on God his best and only Security.

JEREMIAH, ix. 23, 24.

Thus, saith the Lord, Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might; let not the rich man glory in his riches. But let him that glorieth, glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me, that I am the Lord, which exercise loving kindness, judgment, and righteousness in the earth, for in these things I delight, saith the Lord.

IN my former discourse on this text I have stripped the carnal man of all his vain confidences, whether in his own wisdom, or in his might, or in his wealth, and have abundantly made good the first proposition contained in the text; viz. that it is a very sinful and vain thing for any man so to glory in his wisdom, might, or wealth, as to place his trust and confidence in either or all of them. But lest we should seem to discourse only in a destructive way, in taking off poor mortals from their false trusts, and then leave them in despair, and destitute of any other more sure and certain dependance; I proceed now to the second observation, which was this:

The religious acknowledgment of God's providence in the wise and righteous government and disposal of all human affairs, joined with an humble dependance and firm trust on him, in the way of obedience to him, is man's best, yea, only security.

But let him that glorieth, &c. For the full clearing of which observation I shall endeavour

endeavour plainly to demonstrate these three things :

I. That there is a divine Providence that takes notice of, and wisely and righteously directs and governs all human affairs ; i. e. the actions and concerns of all men on earth.

II. That there is a most especial Providence over good men, that orders all things for their good.

III. That therefore we ought, leaving all other earthly dependencies, to commit ourselves to the divine Providence, in the way of piety and sincere obedience to the divine commands, and firmly to rely and trust on it as our best, yea only security. Of these in their order.

I. That there is a wise and righteous providence of God that takes cognizance of and governs the concerns of men on earth, is most plain not only from the holy scriptures, but also from the universal consent even of those civilized heathen nations which know not, or own not, the sacred oracles as such.

1. First, The holy scriptures (the doctrine whereof will appear to him that diligently and impartially enquires into all the intrinsic and extrinsic arguments whereby it is confirmed, to be most certainly of God) in very many places clearly set forth the providence of God over the affairs of men. Hear some few, out of a great abundance that might be produced, most plain and express determinations of sacred writ concerning this matter. Such is that, *For his eyes (i. e. God's eyes) are upon the ways of man, and he seeth all his goings.* (Job, xxxiv. 21.) And that, *The Lord is in his holy temple, the Lord's throne is in heaven ; his eyes behold, and his eyelids try the children of men. The Lord tryeth the righteous ; but the wicked, and him that loveth violence, the Lord hateth.* (Psal. xi. 45.) And, *The Lord looketh from heaven ; he beholdeth all the sons of men. From the place of his habitation he looketh upon all the inhabitants of the earth. He fashioneth their hearts alike :* (or as the Septuagint and the Latin render the Hebrew severally) *He considereth all their works.* (Psal. xxxiii. 13, 14, 15.) And, *The ways of man are before the eyes of the Lord, and he pondereth all his goings.* (Prov. v. 21.) And lastly, *Lord God, behold thou hast made the heaven and the*

earth by thy great power and stretched out arm, and there is nothing too hard for thee. Thou shewest loving kindness unto thousands, and recompensest the iniquity of the fathers into the bosom of their children after them. The great, the mighty God, the Lord of Hosts is his name, great in counsel, and mighty in work : for thine eyes are open upon all the ways of the sons of men, to give every one according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doings. (Jer. xxxii. 17, 18, 19.)

This is the doctrine of the divinely inspired writers, concerning whom it is farther observable, that they have in their very writings not only taught us the doctrine of Providence, but also given us a full and demonstrative proof thereof in those many clear and exact predictions of future contingencies, which by the divine Spirit they have delivered to the world many ages before the things themselves came to pass. Now prophecy is an irrefragable argument of Providence ; for if God foresees the actions of men before they are done, he cannot but see them in the doing ; and those good or evil things, which before-hand he tells shall befall men, we may be sure, when they happen, are the effects of his providence.

(2.) To the doctrine of the holy scriptures concerning the providence of God, all the civilized heathen nations have given their suffrage, not only in word, but (which is more) in fact and practice. For though some conceited and contentious philosophers have ventured to dispute against Providence, yet they could never by all their Sophistry so far prevail against the reason of mankind, and the force of primitive tradition, as to eradicate the settled belief of it. But the generality of men in every age and nation, not wholly degenerated into brutishness, have still practised upon a supposition of a divine Providence overseeing and governing the concerns of men. Of which I shall give you two or three most plain and demonstrative instances.

First, The natural worship of God, consisting in prayer and supplication to him, is and always hath been the practice of all nations not perfectly barbarous. For the truth of which affirmation I appeal to the faith of all heathen historians and writers that are at this day extant. Now what is prayer to God to deliver us

from danger, or to give us any blessing or good thing, but a direct acknowledgment of his providence over us? For to what purpose is it for any man to pray unto him that either cannot or will not hear his prayers, or take any notice of his petitions, or grant what he desires? The divine psalmist seems to me plainly enough to reflect on this; *O thou that hearest prayer, unto thee shall all flesh come* (Psalm lxxv. 2.); where *all flesh* is an expression so wide and comprehensive as that it must at least signify the generality of mankind. Nor is it any wonder that God should be set forth by the psalmist, even to the heathens, as a God that heareth prayer. For we all well know that there is a providence of God over the heathens, which administers at least temporal good things to them without their prayers, and therefore may much more do so upon their prayers and supplications, though misguided, and not well directed. We know that the mariners in the ship with Jonah (though otherwise, as seamen and heathens too, they might have been thought not very inclinable to religion, yet) when they apprehended the danger of shipwreck, had recourse every man to his God by prayer. (Jon. i. 8.) And we know that the supreme and only true God heard their prayers, as proceeding from some honest principles of natural religion in them.

Secondly, The instituted worship of God, (for so I shall presume to call it,) consisting in sacrifices, hath been as universal a practice, in all ages and nations, as the former, and was indeed always joined with it. It were not very difficult (if it were our present business) to shew how from this practice, as taught our first parents after their fall, and from them derived to all mankind descending from them, some of the main doctrines of the gospel itself may be deduced. But however, this is certain, that the doctrine of providence is so legible in the custom of sacrificing, that he who runs may read it: for sacrifices unto God, among the heathens and among all nations that used them, were either for the averting of evils that might come from him, or removing of evils already inflicted by him, as punishments of sin, or to procure those good things from

him which they wanted, or to return thanks to him for good things already received; and so were all of them plain acknowledgments of divine providence.

Thirdly and lastly, The custom of deciding doubtful matters by oaths, hath been, and is likewise received and practised among all nations, that had or have any sense of God left in them. This, as well as the former, is so notorious, that I need not spend my time in the proof of it. Now what are oaths, but downright appeals to the providence of God, whereby we acknowledge his omniscience, and that he knows the truth of all things, and his power and justice, that he can and will punish the authors of falsehood, and protect the lovers of truth. So firm a possession hath the belief of providence always kept in the world.

Let us consider now those objections which some bold and self-opiniated men have brought against it. To omit here the trite and common objection of the present prosperity of some wicked men, and the adversity of some good men, (a full solution whereof you have in the seventy-third Psalm throughout,) the chief cavils of the Epicureans are these two:

Object. 1. That it is inconceivable how God can, at the same moment of time, see and take notice of all the actions of all men on earth, especially their inward actions, the thoughts and secrets of their hearts.

Object. 2. That it seems beneath the majesty of God to regard or concern himself about so low and vile a thing as man is.

Before I distinctly answer these pretences, I shall in general observe this, that they are directly opposite each to the other: for the former objection supposes God too little to see and govern all the actions and concerns of men; the other makes him so great and so high, that he disdains to concern himself about them: in the former the infidel pleads against divine providence, that *non potest*, it cannot take notice of all things on earth; in the latter he objects, *non vacat exiguis*, &c. that God will not concern himself about the little affairs of men, as being unworthy of his cares and regard.

In

In a word, the first objection sets the work of providence, in the government of this world, above God; the second placeth it beneath him. Thus error always contradicts not only the truth, but itself. But let us now encounter these objections severally.

As for the first, that it is inconceivable how all the actions, yea the most inward thoughts, of all men, can, in the same moment of time, be seen and taken notice of by God; it is an objection so foolish, that any rational man may well be ashamed of it. It was as wisely as wittily said of one, That if the brutes were capable of a design to draw the picture of God, they would paint him just like one of themselves: so these brutish men cannot, or rather will not, think of God, the infinite, almighty God, under any other notion than what is adequate to their own, not only finite, but feeble and weak, measures. Thou canst not conceive how God doth see and govern all things in this world; doth it therefore follow, he cannot or doth not so do? A ridiculous consequence! The beasts do not, cannot conceive how we men make ships, and tame the unruly ocean; how, and by what maxims of policy, we frame and govern kingdoms and commonwealths; how we measure the courses of the stars, and take observations of the heavenly bodies; much less how we discourse of religion and divine matters; and yet we are sure we can do, and actually do, all these things. Now it is certain, that we mortal men are infinitely far inferior to the supreme God than the beasts are to us. But let us see whether these great pretenders to reason may not be convinced of their folly, even by sense itself.

Thou that questionest the possibility of God's inspection of all things here below, look up and behold that glorious luminary of heaven the sun; see how, in the same moment, it diffuseth its light and heat into all the several parts and corners of the wide earth exposed to it, and peeps through every crevice of every the most secret place thereof. Now how canst thou see this wonderfully diffusive influence of a created light, and not grant a far more extensive efficacy to the great Creator, the Father of lights?—But to come nearer to thee, consider the very powers and faculties that God hath

given thee, and then thou canst never doubt of the divine power and providence over thee. Do but open thine eyes, and thou canst, in a moment, see to the starry heaven, though at a very vast distance from thee. Now he that made thee see from earth to heaven, cannot he himself much more see from the highest heaven to this earth? And if thou questionest how God can know thine heart and secret thoughts; I ask thee, how thou thyself comest to know them? Didst thou not receive the very faculty of knowing that, and all other things that are knowable by thee, from God? and could he make thee to know that which he himself cannot know? This is the very reasoning of the divine psalmist, where he brings in wicked and profane men thus slighting divine providence; *Yet they say the Lord shall not see, neither shall the God of Jacob regard it.* (Psalm xciv. 7.) And then he excellently refutes them, (ver. 8, 9, 10, 11.) *Understand ye brutish among the people; and, ye fools, when will ye be wise? He that planted the ear, shall he not hear? he that formed the eye, shall he not see? he that chastiseth the heathen, shall not he correct? he that teacheth man knowledge, shall not he know? The Lord knoweth the thoughts of man, that they are vanity.* The foundation of which excellent argumentation is this; whatever perfection there is in created things, it is from God the creator, and therefore in him it must needs be in an eminent manner. Much after the same way the apostle Saint John discourses; *If our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things.* (1 John, iii. 20.) If a man be conscious to himself of his own wickedness, yea the very secret wickedness and hypocrisy of his heart, sure God himself, who set up this candle of conscience (as Solomon calls it, Prov. xx. 27.) in every man, cannot be ignorant of it, he being the fountain of knowledge, and all knowledge in the creature derivative from him; and so knowing all things that are knowable by any creature, and infinitely more. But I have, perhaps, spent too much time in answering a foolish objection.

I therefore proceed to refute the other cavil against divine providence, that pretends it to be beneath the majesty of God to take notice of the mean and vile concerns of men on earth. The former

objection assaulted the omniscience of God, this strikes at his goodness; and, therefore, though it be more specious, is yet really every whit as impious as the other. Now here it is to be confessed, that we men on earth, yea the most glorious creatures of heaven, the angels, are infinitely beneath the majesty of God, the creator of all things; but yet we say also, that whatsoever the infinite majesty of God was pleased at first to create and make, and in any degree to communicate his goodness unto, cannot be thought unworthy of his after-care and providence; yea, by and from its first creation, it is in a manner entitled to the future providence of God that created it. It was the goodness of God, being self-sufficient, and from eternal ages perfectly happy in himself, that moved him, in that point of duration which his infinite wisdom saw most fitting, as it were to go forth and down from himself, and to give being to very many things, and to communicate his goodness to each of them in such degrees as the same his infinite wisdom was pleased to assign; and from the same goodness whereby he created things, he still preserves them, provides for them, and takes care of them.

The work of creation and providence are both equally a *συγκατάβασις*, (as some of the ancient fathers term it,) a condescension in God; and of this gracious condescension the sacred writers take special notice. So the divine psalmist; *The Lord is high above all nations, and his glory above the heavens. Who is like unto the Lord our God, who dwelleth on high? who humbleth himself to behold the things that are in heaven and earth.* (Psal. cxiii. 4, 5, 6.) As if he had said, the majesty of God is not only above all the nations of the earth, but his glory is also above the heavens and all the excellent powers and inhabitants thereof; and yet such is his unparalleled goodness and condescension, that he humbleth himself to behold and take notice of the transactions both in heaven and earth: this is the plain sense of that text, and the hyperbaton which our learned English paraphrast suggests is manifestly forced and violent, as he himself at last doth little less than confess. So that if we look to the infinite majesty of God, without respect to his goodness, the

heavenly affairs are as well beneath his care and providence as the concerns of men on earth; but yet such is the goodness of God, that he certainly takes care of both.

And as to the condescension of God in his special care of man, the same divinely inspired writer excellently discourses of it; *When I consider the heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon, and the stars which thou hast ordained; What is man, that thou art mindful of him? or the son of man, that thou visitest him?* (Psal. viii. 3, 4.) i. e. When I view the heavens, and contemplate that stupendous work of thine, and therein behold thy super-eminent glory and majesty; I cannot but be amazed to think, that thou, so great a God, shouldst take such care of so mean and vile a thing as man is. The psalmist questions not God's special regard to the sons of men, but wonders at his goodness and gracious condescension therein: question it, I say, he doth not; for he presently observes a plain demonstration of it, in the very constitution and frame of nature, whereby it is so ordered that man hath an universal dominion given him over this whole lower world, (ver. 5, 6, 7.) *For thou hast made him a little lower than the angels, and hast crowned him with glory and honour. Thou madest him to have dominion over the works of thy hands; thou hast put all things under his feet: all sheep and oxen, yea, and the beasts (i. e. the wild beasts) of the field; the fowl of the air, and the fish of the sea; and whatsoever passeth through the paths of the sea.* Thus I have dispatched my first particular, viz. that there is a wise and righteous providence of God, that takes cognizance of and governs the concerns of men on earth.

II. I proceed hence to the second head of discourse which I have proposed to myself, viz. That there is a most especial providence of God over good men, that orders all things for their good.

The providence of God is indeed over all things on earth, but not over all things alike. God takes care of the very brute creatures, the psalmist telling us, that *he giveth to the beast his food, and to the young ravens which cry*, being, as soon as they are hatched, left destitute and forsaken by the old ones. (Psal. cxlvii. 9.) But God's regard to man is such, that,

that, in comparison thereof, the holy text seems to deny that he hath any regard to beasts. *Doth God take care for oxen?* saith the apostle. (1 Cor. ix. 9.) Yes he doth; but he hath a far greater regard to men; and therefore that law, *Thou shalt not muzzle the mouth of the ox that treadeth out the corn*, teacheth us not only that we should do right to our labouring beasts, but also and much more that we should not defraud such men as by their labours, especially in the work of the gospel, deserve well at our hands of their due reward, which is the reasoning of the apostle in that place. Hence it is, that the very lives of the brutes are permitted by providence, yea given by the divine law, to the use and service of man; and he is allowed to take and kill, not only the beasts of the earth, but the birds of the air, and the fishes of the sea, to furnish out a plentiful table for himself.

Among men there is a most especial providence of God over those that are his children, that imitate his goodness, and walk in the paths of virtue and righteousness. The divine apostle tells us, *That the living God is σωτήρ, the saviour, or preserver, of all men, but especially of those that believe.* (1 Tim. iv. 10.)

Wonderful are the expressions in scripture of God's tender care and kindness towards good men. Our Saviour tells us, that the very *hairs of their head are numbered* (Matt. x. 30.); where the speech is proverbial. We use to number and take account of things we value; and, on the other side, those things we esteem and regard not, we are said to make no account or reckoning of them. An hair signifies the very least thing, and the loss of an hair the least damage; so that the sense is, the very least concerns of good men are regarded by God, nor will he suffer them to sustain the least detriment in the way of piety and righteousness, which shall not tend to their greater good. God is said to be as tender of his people as a man is of the apple, or pupil, of his eye, of which we know every man is very careful that it receive not the least hurt. (Deut. xxxii. 10.) And David prays to God for his especial providence over himself, in the very same phrase; *Shew thy marvellous loving kindness, O thou that savest, by thy right hand, them which put their trust in thee, from those that rise up*

against them; keep me as the apple of the eye, &c. (Psal. xvii. 7, 8); i. e. (saith the English paraphrast) "Let thy watchful and tender providence fence and secure me from all dangers, after the same manner as nature hath provided eyebrows and lids, and five tunicles for guards to fence and preserve the black (the most tender part) in the middle of the eye, that wherein the visive faculty is placed."

And, indeed, abundant is the provision that God hath made for the defence and security of his faithful ones. The holy angels themselves are commanded to leave the heavenly blissful habitations, and to hover over this earth for their protection and preservation. For they are styled by the divine author of the Epistle to the Hebrews, (chap. i. 14.) *ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation*: and the psalmist tells us, *The angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear him, and delivereth them.* (Psal. xxxiv. 7.) Upon which it presently follows, (ver. 8.) *O taste and see, that the Lord is good! blessed is the man that trusteth in him.* Yea our Lord himself assures us, that his little ones, those that imitate the innocence and humility of little children, *have their angels in heaven.* (Matt. xviii. 10.) Hence the holy angels are termed *the eyes of the Lord*, as being the instruments of his watchful providence over good men. So, *The eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to shew himself* (it should be themselves) *strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect towards him* (2 Chron. xvi. 9.): where that, by *the eyes of the Lord* are meant angels of God, is plain enough from the words themselves, which clearly express the very employment of the holy angels, in being sent and running to and fro through the earth for the protection and security of good and upright men; and which, indeed, can hardly be made sense without admitting that interpretation.

And the same is farther evident, from other parallel texts of scripture; in the fourth chapter of the prophecy of Zechariah, (ver. 2.) we have a vision of seven lamps in a golden candlestick; the interpretation of which vision is thus given, (ver. 10.) *Those seven, they are the eyes of the Lord, which run to and fro throughout the*

the whole earth. Now what those *seven eyes of the Lord* are, we learn from St. John, where we have a vision of the Lamb, *having seven horns and seven eyes*, (Rev. v. 6.) which are the seven spirits of God sent forth into all the earth: and those spirits he terms angels, *I saw the seven angels which stood before God.* (Rev. viii. 2.) So again, we read of *seven spirits*, (Rev. i. 4.) which are before God's throne, i. e. wait in his presence; do not sit upon, but stand before his throne ready to receive his commands; and are therefore, undoubtedly, created spirits. For the understanding of which places, we are to know, that the ancient Jews believed, that among the holy angels, those eyes of God and instruments of his watchful providence over us, there are seven principal ones, as it were, chief captains and commanders of the heavenly host. So, in the ancient though apocryphal book of Tobit, the angel Raphael is brought in thus speaking to Tobit and his son, *I am Raphael, one of the seven holy angels—which go in and out before the glory of the Holy One.* (Tobit, xii. 15.) And that this was no vain speculation of the Jews appears from those texts of canonical scripture, both of the Old and New Testament, which we have but now alleged. But this by the way: I proceed.

By this ministry of his holy angels, God preserves the faithful, his children, from infinite unseen dangers, especially from their ghostly enemies, and directs them in all their ways, and blesses and gives good success (oftentimes strangely and unexpectedly) to their honest undertaking. And of this I have given several instances, in my Discourse “Of the Office of the holy Angels, in Reference to good Men, &c.” which I shall not now repeat.

Now what a wonderful condescension of the divine goodness is this, that the glorious courtiers of heaven, the intimate servants of the supreme King and Lord of the world, should thus attend upon us vile clods of earth! And how safe and happy must the good man needs be, under the conduct of these wise, good, and powerful, guardians! How easily can they, how readily will they, upon the command of our heavenly Father, preserve us from dangers, supply our wants, direct our courses, and give a

prosperous issue to all our affairs! In a word, whether we look on the providence of God over the faithful in the fountain or in the streams, in the first Mover or in the inferior wheels, in the principal Cause or in the instruments; it appears every way an abundant provision for, and security to them.

For a concluding proof whereof, I shall only add that illustrious text, *The Lord God is a sun and shield; the Lord will give grace and glory; no good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly.* (Psal. lxxxiv. 11.) Divine providence is not only a shield over the truly virtuous, to secure them from dangers, but a sun also continually shining on their heads, and sending forth upon them the comfortable beams and influences of his grace and favour. He not only removes evils from them, but supplies them with all good things that are indeed good for them. If they are fit for a wealthy prosperous condition, they shall have it, and that with God's blessing: but if a meaner condition be more convenient for them, they shall be made happy therein. If at any time afflictions be needful, (as they are often as necessary for our souls as physic is for our bodies,) they shall taste of the goodness of their heavenly Father, even in them; they shall be supported under them, and made better by them; and, in God's due time, delivered from them. If God tries them, he will assist them in the trial, and crown them after it: and, in a word, divine providence will so order all the occurrences of the good man's life in this world, as shall best conduce to his eternal happiness in the other; which is, indeed, the only main chance and great concern that we ought always, and above all things, to mind and think of.

III. And this brings me to the third and last stage of my discourse, That therefore we ought, leaving all other earthly dependencies, to commit ourselves to the divine providence, in the way of piety and sincere obedience to the divine commands, and firmly to rely and trust on it as our best, yea only security. Which being so plain a consequence from what hath been already delivered, I shall be brief in the handling of it, and so conclude.

Trust

Trust and dependance on the divine providence is every where in scripture recommended as our great duty and only security; so that we can scarce open our Bibles, but we meet with something that minds us of it: but of so great an abundance which might be produced, I shall select only two or three texts that most plainly serve for this purpose. Hear the psalmist; *Cast thy burden upon the Lord, and he shall sustain thee: he shall never suffer the righteous to be moved.* (Psal. lv. 22.) Hear him again; *Trust in the Lord and do good, so shalt thou dwell in the land, and verily thou shalt be fed. Delight thyself also in the Lord, and he shall give thee the desire of thine heart. Commit thy way unto the Lord, trust also in him, and he shall bring it to pass* (Psal. xxxvii. 3, 4, 5.); where, upon our trust in God, it is promised that God will give us even the desire of our hearts, i. e. if not the particular, yet the general desire of our hearts: for we all desire, in general, that which is good, though we too often err in the particular choice, taking that for good which is, indeed, hurtful for us. Now if God deny that particular thing which we think to be good for us, but is not, and gives us that which he himself knows to be indeed good for us, he deals with us as becomes a wise and gracious Father; and thus he always deals with them that trust and depend on him. It is a shame for us Christians to be ignorant of this, when the heathen poet could say,

— Si consilium vis,
Permites ipsis expendere Numinibus, quid
Conveniat nobis, rebusque sit utile nostris.
Nam pro jucundis, aptissima quæque dabunt
Dii.
Charior est illis homo quam sibi—

i. e. "Our best way is to leave it to the gods (so he speaks in compliance with the custom of his countrymen) to judge and determine what is useful and convenient for us. For they will certainly give us, instead of those things that most please us, those things that are fittest for us. For they have a greater care of man than he hath of himself."

But as to our duty of trusting in God, full is the expression of Solomon in the text we have more than once mentioned; *Trust in the Lord with all thine heart.* (Prov. iii. 5.) Every man almost pre-

tends to trust in God, but few trust on him in truth, and with the whole heart. Whereof this is a plain demonstration: no man heartily trusts in God, but he that doth every day commit himself and all his concerns in general to the divine Providence, by serious prayer, and in every particular occurrence and business of moment, makes his particular address to God, by humble supplication, for his direction and blessing. Now how very few are there of those that pretend to trust in God that do thus.

And, after all, we are still to remember the proviso already given, that our dependance on God's providence must be accompanied with a sincere obedience to his commands. Hence the psalmist joins both together in the above alleged text; *Trust in the Lord, and do good* (Psal. xxxvii. 3.); and Solomon, in the text last mentioned, after he had said, *Trust in the Lord with all thine heart*, presently subjoins, *Fear the Lord, and depart from evil.* (Prov. iii. 5. 7.) Our hope in God is presumption, without due regard to his laws, and an uniform obedience to his commands. And to convince us of the perfect vanity of such presumption, let us but attentively consider what that providence of God is, that we pretend to trust in. That special providence of God which is man's only security, (as we have above described it,) is nothing less than his special love and kindness to man, whereby he hath a tender regard to all his concerns; and, as a signal expression thereof, sends his holy angels, those most glorious spirits, to pitch their tents round about him, and to take a singular care and tuition of him, in all his ways.

Now what an intolerable impudence is it in any wicked man to depend on such a providence of God over him? With what face canst thou expect God's special care and regard of thy concerns, that hast so little or no regard of his commands? Can the adulterer, the drunkard, the liar, the slanderer, the backbiter, the common swearer, the cheat, the unjust man, the covetous and worldly man, the spiteful and malicious man, or any man that continues in any wilful transgression of any known law of God, be a darling of divine Providence? Will the angels, the holy angels of God, those faithful ministers of his, attend on, and do good offices

offices for such as refuse to serve their great Lord and Master, yea live in downright rebellion against his government? Can the glorious host of heaven wait on the vassals of hell? This cannot be.

Indeed, who can be worthy of that providence of God which we have set forth? No man, by a worthiness of merit. But yet there is a worthiness of meetness, fitness, and due disposition required in all that expect to be favourites of the Almighty, and objects of his more especial care and providence. And this worthiness consists in a firm belief of the special providence of God over good men, in a sincere and hearty endeavour to obey God in all things; i. e. to become ourselves good men, that we may be entitled to such his providence over us, and then in an entire trust and dependance on it.

Wherefore (to conclude) let us all in good earnest make it our great business to serve God, to study to know his will, and to do it when we know it; and then we are safe. Whosoever thou art, that hearest me this day, be persuaded presently to forsake thy sinful courses, and entirely to resign up thyself to the divine government, and then be secure of the divine protection and special providence over thee; then let loose the reins of thy hope and confidence in God, and trust in his gracious providence as much as thou canst, and thou shalt never be confounded. God shall lead thee, by a most gracious economy, through this vale of tears, the whole course of thy pilgrimage in this world; directing thee in all difficulties, comforting thee in all sorrows and distresses, blessing all earthly enjoyments that he gives thee, and supplying the want of those that he thinks fit to deny thee, with greater blessings; and in the life to come, he shall pour out the full riches of his grace and goodness on thee.

For which blessed life, God, of his infinite mercy, fit us; and thereinto, in his due time, admit us all; through Jesus Christ our Lord and Saviour:

To whom, with the Father and the Holy Ghost, be ascribed all honour and glory, might, majesty, and dominion, both now, and for evermore. Amen.

SERMON CXLV.

By RICHARD BUNDY, D. D.

Late Rector of East-Barnet, &c.

The Example of Jesus Christ recommended to Imitation.

I PET. ii. 21.

—That ye should follow his steps.

WHOEVER looks into his own make and constitution must allow it to be with great justice observed, that one of the most easy and most effectual methods of instruction is that of setting before men a winning example. Precepts are somewhat dry and harsh to those who are not used to speculations, and it requires some trouble to make the application. But example makes the rule plain and familiar to us: it provokes our emulation, and easily gains upon the affections: there is something sensible and visible in it which procures it the readier access to the mind; and it not only shews us the practicableness of our duty, but likewise the loveliness of it. There seems to be much the same difference between good rules of living and a good life, as between the finest description or painting of a beautiful prospect, and a view of that prospect itself: the description may entertain the reader, and the painting please the spectator, and both may be instructive too; but the naked eye will take in more at one view, and with more pleasure and delight, than any words or colours could convey to the mind; and this without the labour of learning the use and beauty of words, or the rules and excellencies of art: and so it is with a good life; every man is convinced and powerfully drawn by it; he sees more charms in it than he can express; and how contrary soever his own practice may be, yet he will readily acknowledge that he cannot but sincerely wish in his heart, that he was that good man himself. And in this particular, as well as others, the Christian religion has a great advantage over other institutions, that the blessed Author of it was pleased to live and die among us, and practise those duties which he requires of us: so that we can take a view of his religion in

in his life as well as in his doctrines, and have a most excellent pattern to copy after; thereby to quicken us in the discharge of our duty, and provoke us to live as he lived. The holy evangelists have given us the history of his life, told with a manly noble simplicity not to be paralleled, and with a clearness scarce to be misunderstood. And St. Peter, in the text, says of one part of it what is equally true of all the rest, that one gracious design of it was, *to leave us an example, that we should follow his steps.*

The use to which I intend to apply these words at present, is to make a few such practical observations on the life of the blessed Jesus, as may be of general use to us in the conduct of ours. And since it is absolutely necessary that all characters which are designed for imitation, should not be drawn too high, lest they terrify instead of alluring; whilst on the other hand, it is so mighty easy to soar beyond the reach of man, in contemplations on the conduct of the Son of God; I shall therefore confine my remarks to his behaviour as the son of man, utterly exclusive of his divine character; and to such things as are level to all capacities, adapted to all seasons, and such as may and must be copied after and transcribed, in a greater or less degree, by all his disciples. And

I. I observe of the life of the blessed Jesus, that he was always intent on the main business he came about. His father had given him a work to do, and he never lost sight of it: this work was, *to do the will of him that sent him*, which we find he ever had in his view.

When he had tarried behind his parents at Jerusalem, hearing and making inquiries of the doctors of the law, and his mother reproved him for that he gave her no notice of it, and therefore Joseph and she *had sought him sorrowing*; he replies, *Knew you not that I must be about my Father's business?* This was to be his first care at all times and on all occasions; and no regard to any persons or things was to cause him to neglect it.

When he came to be baptized of John, and the Baptist refused him, saying, *I have need to be baptized of thee, and comest thou to me?* he answers, *Suffer it to be so now, for thus it becometh us to fulfil all*

righteousness. Whatever promoted the ends of righteousness and virtue was a part of his work; and neither the dignity of his own person, nor the inferiority of him who was to minister to him, could divert him from the discharge of it.

When his disciples brought him meat, after his discourse with the woman of Samaria, and desired him to eat; he replies, *I have meat to eat which ye know not of: my meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work.* I do not live by bread alone. My first concern is to do my duty. This was to do good whenever opportunity offered, to recover the lost, and soften the impenitent; and this he had been mercifully attempting with the poor woman of Samaria, notwithstanding the wickedness of her past life, or the censures he might incur by such a conversation.

When he passed by a man that was born blind, and was asked whether it was for his own or his parents sin that he was so born; he replies, that the design of it was only to give him an occasion to exert his power. And from this occasion he infers the necessity of it: *I must work the works of him that sent me while it is yet day; the night cometh wherein no man can work.* No occasion is to be lost; this life only is the time of trial: and accordingly he heals the man, and converts him.

And lastly, When he talked of going to Judea to see Lazarus, and his disciples seemed surprised at it, *because the Jews had lately sought to stone him there*; his answer was in effect this, that what was improper at one season might be necessary in another, and that in general while the day lasted he must work without regard to fear or danger: and accordingly he went up to his friend Lazarus, and raised him from the dead.

From all which it is evident, that his thoughts were ever intent on the great design of his coming; that no regard to persons or things could divert him from it; no unworthiness in the object discourage him; no fear, either of censure or suffering, terrify him from pursuing it.

And in this every one of his disciples may follow his example. Every man has his work set him as well as the blessed Jesus, and should, like him, ever have it in his view. Every one's business in
this

this world is to prepare for a better; to purify his heart and mind from sin and corruption; and to make a daily progress towards perfection. This is *the will of him that sent us*; and whoever will faithfully discharge it must bear it ever in his thoughts. He must remember, like his blessed Master, that this is to be his main end in view at all times, and on all occasions; that he is, as far as human frailty will permit, to be ever upon his guard against the attacks of sin; ever ready and open to embrace all opportunities of growing in virtue; and that, neither the frowns nor the favour of men, neither the profits nor the discouragements of the world, are to divert him from this great point in view; but he is to keep his eye steadily fixed upon it to the end of life, *till the night cometh in which no man can work*.

II. Another observation to be made on the life of the blessed Jesus is, that we find him always easy and satisfied with the accommodation he meets with. He receives his lot with submission and obedience, is ever pleased and contented with it, and whatever happened was best to him. There appears throughout his whole conversation a great indifference as to what we call the conveniencies and comforts of life; and he plainly did not think any thing that befel him sufficient cause for murmur or complaint: he lived in the world without setting his heart upon it; and was therefore neither elated nor depressed with the good or evil that happened to him in it. In his youth he resided with his supposed parents, was satisfied with their low and laborious state, and in all probability worked with Joseph at his calling. When he appeared in public, if he was invited to a feast he partook of it: if he met with scorn and contempt he submitted to it. We see no great effusions of joy at the good that befel him; no great sorrow or mourning for the evil; but he acquiesced in either as it happened, and thought it of no very great consequence which was his portion. The reason of which is plainly this, that he did not think himself at home: he considered himself as in a foreign country, and therefore, like a wise traveller, made the best of his way to his own, and gave himself very little concern about any thing that happened on the road. It were folly for

any one to make the common inconveniencies of a journey matter of settled grief and complaint, or to suffer the amusements of it so to engross all his thoughts as to make him forget where he is. And therefore our Lord was neither fond of the one, nor uneasy about the other, but pursued his way with cheerfulness, and expected no happiness till he came to the end of it, and entered into the joys of his Father's kingdom.

And how happy would it be for themselves, how happy for the world, if his disciples would herein follow their Master's example! The reason of this his conduct holds as strongly with regard to us as it did with him. The world is no more our home than it was his; and the greatest part of us tarry as little a while in it as he did. And whence then these boundless and indefatigable cares about the concerns of it? This single consideration is sufficient to demonstrate the folly of an insatiable avarice, and the madness of a restless ambition. To what purpose is one man ever craving and heaping up, without regard to the divine or human laws, and another sacrificing all duty to his thirst of power; but to gratify appetites which are never to be satisfied, and procure riches and authority which he cannot possibly enjoy long, and may never enjoy at all? And on the other hand, to what purpose do men murmur and cry out loudly against Heaven for their disappointments of this kind, but needlessly to add sin to sin, and torment themselves without cause? To what purpose is it to add to our sufferings despair, and indulge impatience under evils which cannot last long, and may end, if we please, in an everlasting glory? The blessed Jesus has set us a very different example, if we will *walk in his steps*. His conduct will teach us to keep a guard upon our passions; to proportion our value of things to their real worth, and not the corrupt opinions of men; and to remember that we have here no abiding city. His rule was that of the Son of Sirach, *Whatsoever thou doest, remember the end, and thou wilt never do amiss*. This would shew us the vanity of worldly joys, and lessen the terrors of worldly sufferings; it would encourage us under difficulties, and quicken us in our duty; and it would by degrees make us truly sensible, that indeed it is of little consequence

sequence how we fare here, if we can but secure ourselves an eternal mansion of bliss in our Father's house.

III. We may observe farther of the blessed Jesus, that he was humble, meek, and benevolent in all his deportment towards men. The particular St. Peter alludes to in the text is, that *when he was reviled he reviled not again; when he suffered he threatened not.* And what was ever more just than his own character of himself, that he *was meek and lowly of heart?* What various instances of humility, benevolence, and love to mankind, shine out in all his actions! Every part of his conduct was a testimony of his love, every act of his life a proof of it. With what an unwearied application does he labour to do men good, even in spite of themselves? With what mildness and temper does he bear their insults; what compassion does he shew to their infirmities and faults; and what readiness to help and deliver them? Nothing could provoke him to return evil for evil; no temptation ensnare him to lay aside his mercy. It is perhaps one of the most difficult parts of Christian charity to be able to bear the sins of others, and to labour to recover them, without either pride, insolence, or censure: and that we might not want a precedent for it, the blessed Jesus has given us one in his own conduct towards the woman taken in adultery. When the proud and the censorious bring her to him, and insolently triumph at her iniquity, with what justice and wisdom does he strike them dumb; and with what engaging mildness and mercy reprove her! *Has no man condemned thee? No man, Lord. Neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin no more.* And throughout his whole life, with what condescension and pity does he converse with the most despised and most wicked part of mankind, and endeavour to melt them into a sense of their duty by his mildness and love? With what openness of heart does he receive all that come to him; with what pleasure give every good action its just commendation; with what tenderness does he cherish every inclination to virtue? So true was the prophet's description of him! so much was it one of his chief cares, *that the bruised reed should not be broken, or the smoking flax be quenched!* And, on the other hand, with what warmth does he

condemn all malicious and revengeful thoughts for real injuries; with what forbearance and forgiveness overlook, and even excuse offences? One of the severest reproofs he ever gave his disciples was when they desired him to call for fire from heaven to consume those who used him ill, and would not receive him. *He rebuked them,* says the evangelist, *and said, ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of.* And in the article of death itself, he not only prays for his murderers, but pleads their excuse, *Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.*

Such was the conduct of the blessed Jesus, and such ought to be the deportment of all his disciples. *If he so loved the worst of men,* the consequence is sure and inevitably conclusive, *that we ought also to love one another:* that we should bear with one another's faults and infirmities, stifle our resentments, and subdue our pride. Humility is the handmaid to charity as well as to devotion; the more sensible we are of our own faults, the more compassion we shall have for those of other men; the more ready we shall be to forgive as we would be forgiven; and the more we grow in this virtue, the greater will be our progress in all other Christian graces. They are all founded in mercy, and built up in love, and can dwell only with the meek and humble spirit. If there be any one sin which at once subverts all the principles of Christianity, it is that of an inveterate and implacable malice. They are as contrary as light and darkness, and can no more be reconciled and dwell in the same breasts than God and Mammon. The gospel breathes nothing but *peace and goodwill towards men;* requires that we should be *gentle, and easy to be intreated;* expressly teaches us, that whoever *rejoices in iniquity,* or does not rejoice in doing good, has no charity, and that whoever has not charity, in a Christian sense, has nothing.

IV. And lastly, Our great Master was, with regard to God, constant in his attendance on his worship, and devout without ostentation. When the laws of his religion required it, he went up to Jerusalem at the three great festivals, and paid his devotions there. And at other times we find him frequently discharging the great duty of prayer, but for the most part in privacy and retirement. He shews us the importance of the duty, and the bounds

bounds we are to set to it. He makes its merit to consist in the disposition and elevation of the heart; and not in external appearances, or forms of speech, or vain repetitions. He utterly condemns all ostentatious shews of it; and teaches us, that at least all acts of sacrifice are to give way to those of mercy, when both cannot be performed: so that we may learn from his behaviour the nature of the duty, and the most proper methods of discharging it. He was very frequent in his addresses to heaven, to shew us the importance of it, and he chose the secret recesses of mountains and gardens, and the darkness of the night, as most proper for it. But he neither places the whole or the main substance of religion in it; nor does he desert the world in order to discharge it. This duty has its times and seasons as well as all others, and is regularly to take its course with them, but not exclude them. To retire from the world and become acquainted with God, to lay open our hearts before him, and breathe out our wants and desires in the fervours of devotion, is no doubt essential to the Christian life, and never to be neglected by those who would make a progress in it. But this is not all; there is something too selfish for Christianity in giving ourselves up wholly, even to acts of devotion; when we have thus taken care of ourselves, we must return again to the world, and take what care we can of our fellow-creatures, in the faithful discharge of all those offices which Christianity gives them a right to demand of us: this did our Lord and Master; and this must his disciples do who would follow his steps. If his example was a perfect pattern for us, (which surely no Christian will deny,) Christian perfection then cannot consist in absolutely renouncing the world, but in so using it as not to abuse it, and keeping our hearts and affections free and disengaged from it; not in devoting ourselves wholly to acts of piety, but in a conscientious discharge of them and other duties together; and particularly, in labouring after that noble spirit of universal charity which enables men to bear all evil, and do all sorts of good, to the unthankful as well as to the deserving; and in that sense *to become perfect, as our Father in heaven is perfect.*

Would we then follow our Lord's example, we must be constant in our at-

tendance on the public worship of God, and no less diligent in the discharge of our private devotions to him. We must be ever intent on the main business of this life, which is to prepare us for another. We must remember that this world is not our home, but only the road thither; and therefore take great care to keep our hearts at liberty, so that none of its false allurements and corrupt temptations chain down our affections to it. We must raise our thoughts from earth to heaven, fix our minds upon God, consider his divine perfections, and the wonders of his love to us, till our hearts are warmed and enlivened with a love for him. And we must at the same time remember to grow daily in love to our fellow-creatures for his sake, and treat and esteem them as his children and members of his body, as well knowing the certainty of this rule, that *he who loves God will love his brother also.* In this sense we are daily to grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord, till we come to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ: that is, till we have rectified our inward man, and by degrees brought our whole hearts and minds to an habitual state, temper, and inclination to all virtue and holiness; or in other words, till we so love him, and his creatures, as he loved us. So that the whole extent of our duty, and the whole business of our lives, is comprehended in one single word, charity; and that for the reason St. Paul gives us, because *charity never fails*; or in other words, because to love God and one another is not only our duty in this, but will be likewise our eternal employment and happiness in the world to come. And if we consider the life of the blessed Jesus in this light, we cannot want a precedent or encouragement to every species of it. What was his whole life but a constant series of doing good; one continued act of love, varied in all the expressions of it, that the souls, the bodies, the wants, the infirmities, and the wickedness of men could require? nay, what is his present office at the right hand of God but the continuance of his love; the offering of our prayers to his Father, the making them acceptable to him, by pleading those merits in our behalf which *take away the sins of the world.*

SERMON CXLVI.

On deserting our Religion.

MATT. X. 33.

But whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven.

IN this chapter we find the Saviour of the world sending his twelve disciples on their first mission, to preach the glad tidings of the gospel to the Jews. And in order to qualify them fully for it, he endues them with miraculous powers, to confirm the truth of their doctrines; commands them to make no preparations for their journey; and teaches them how they should behave themselves in it: and that they might not be disappointed in the event, he foretels them what would be the final consequence of their preaching, not only to themselves, but likewise to those that heard them, both here and hereafter. He commands them to provide neither money, nor more clothes than they had on, for their present journey (ver. 9, 10.); but refer themselves to the justice of their cause, and his providence that sent them. He commands them to preach the *kingdom of heaven* only to the *lost sheep of the house of Israel*; and in proof of its approach, to *cleanse their lepers, heal their sick*, and exercise their other miraculous gifts among them, with the same freedom with which they had received them. (Ver. 7, 8.) He foretels, with regard to themselves, that they should hereafter be imprisoned, scourged, and *brought before kings and governors for his sake*; and *for a testimony against those kings and governors in particular, and in general, against all the gentiles*, among whom they should preach. And with regard to those who should hear them, he most graciously declares, on the one hand, that *whosoever received them* should be understood by our Lord to have shewn the same respect to himself; and *whosoever should thus receive him* should be rewarded as if he had received that God *who sent him* (ver. 40.): and on the other hand, he most terribly donounces, that it should be more tolerable for *Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment*, than for those cities which did not receive them, (ver. 14, 15.) and in the words of the text, that *whosoever shall deny him before man,*

him will he also deny before his Father which is in heaven. In speaking to which words I shall endeavour to shew:

I. What is meant by *denying* our blessed Lord *before men*.

II. The heinous nature of this sin.

III. The great danger of it, and the terror of the threatening here denounced against it. And,

IV. and lastly, I shall conclude with an inference or two with respect to ourselves.

I. The first thing is to shew, what is meant by *denying* our blessed Lord *before men*; which (when applied to those who have once professed the gospel) must primarily signify their avowed apostacy from the sacred truths of our religion; their openly and voluntarily relinquishing the profession of our most holy faith, for judaism, heathenism, or what some men call the religion of nature, or which is worse, for no religion at all. This is denying the Lord of life in the worst sense; it is *trampling under foot the blood of the Son of God* with the greatest scorn and contempt; and it is *doing* the highest *despite to the Holy Spirit of grace*. It is treating our adorable Redeemer as a cheat and an impostor; it is rejecting his doctrines as false, or at least as not sufficiently supported; and it seems therefore to be doing all that in them lies, to be guilty of that *sin against the Holy Ghost, which shall not be forgiven, neither in this world, nor in the world to come*: for either they do believe that there were such persons as our blessed Saviour and his apostles in the world about seventeen hundred years ago, and that they did perform the wonderful things which are recorded of them; or they do not. If they do not believe these facts, they must, in effect, contend that no credit is to be given to any history, and deny any thing to be true which they have not seen. And if they do believe that such persons did preach the gospel, and that such miracles were wrought by them, their base apostacy from Christianity implies, that they impute those works to infernal agents, and make them the operations of devils: that is, they put those demonstrations of the spirit, and of power, the mighty gifts of the Holy Ghost, upon a level with magical incantations or delusions: they, in effect, say of our Lord and Master, that he and his disciples had *unclean spirits*; which was the crime of

which the Jews were guilty, when they were told that the sin against the Holy Ghost should not be forgiven unto men. There is indeed this difference between them, that the Jews saw the works of the Son of God wrought, which our modern apostates do not; but when it is remembered, that the testimony of the Spirit was not then given to the truth of his doctrine; and when the attestation of the whole Christian church for so many ages is thrown into the balance against the bare want of seeing those things which have been, and are so fully proved; I fear equity will require but very little abatement to be made in the sentence on that account. And whoever considers the daring iniquity of thus openly bidding defiance to the Son of God, will not wonder that even the meek and humble Jesus should pronounce, concerning such offenders, that he will deny them to have any share in his atonement at the great day of retribution, when he will come to judge both the quick and the dead. But of this more hereafter.

Next to the open apostacy from the faith, a second kind of denial of our Lord is that of those who are either afraid or ashamed to confess him, in times of reproach or danger. Unless men are very firmly established in the faith, it is no wonder that persecutions and death should terrify them from the open profession of it. Human infirmities and human passions considered, those are such strong temptations as the weak and wavering in their religion cannot well be expected to resist. And therefore, says our blessed Lord of the seed sown in *stony places*, that they at first *receive the word with joy, but when persecution or tribulation ariseth because of the word, they are presently offended*; that is, they forsake the truth and disown it. But even this, we know, will not be allowed as a sufficient plea in the sight of God, to excuse our denial of his beloved Son in the sight of men. His *love to us surpasseth knowledge*; and he requires in return, that ours for him should exceed all others which can come in competition with it. He underwent the most grievous pains, inflicted in the most unjust and aggravating manner, for our salvation; and he requires that neither life nor death should separate us from him, or deter us from glorifying in his cross. And if those who call themselves by his name want re-

solution to do this, it is either because they do not enough consider the wonders of his life, death, and mediation; or do not duly apply themselves to that purity of heart, and elevation of mind, which the gospel prescribes. And therefore, says our blessed Lord, *He that loveth father or mother, sister or brother, wife or children, more than me, is not worthy of me*; and *he that forsaketh not all that he hath, (life itself not excepted, when he can enjoy it on no other terms than denying the faith,) and followeth not after me, is not worthy of me*. To which I shall add,

Thirdly, That it is a virtual and tacit denial of our Lord, to neglect frequenting the public offices of the Christian church; if done either in compliance with the vicious customs and humours of men, who blasphemously revile and despise a crucified Saviour, or out of an idle and foolish fear of being thought weak or superstitious. When Christianity is become the religion of a country, it is to be expected that many persons will for fashion sake only profess it; and when wealth, luxury, and all kinds of excess increase and get ground in that country, it is by no means strange that the proud, the luxurious, and the lustful, should in their hearts be enemies to the meek, the humble, the pure, and the mortifying doctrines of the blessed Jesus. And if they proceed one step farther to blasphemies and revilings, they only speak a language which is consistent with their general conduct, and the open revolt or desertion of such corrupted members could be no real loss or injury to the true mystical body of the Christian church. But for those who are at all sincere in their profession of the gospel, to be led by fashion, or custom, or a vain fear of the censures and reproaches of the scorner, to neglect the public worship of their God and Saviour; this betrays the greatest weakness of mind, and is unquestionably a crime of a very deep dye. To do this on such motives is plainly to prefer the praise of men, of weak, wicked, and foolish men, to the praise of God; and it is so far denying our blessed Lord before them, as it implies a backwardness and false shame, to appear open and constant in professing him. One design of the institution of Christian worship is to testify our own sincerity, and to edify others

others by paying our devotions, in the most open and public manner, to that God whom we profess to serve; and our creeds are wisely inserted in the public offices of that worship, that, by repeating them openly and audibly, in the face of the congregation, we should acquit ourselves of any suspicions of being ashamed to confess our Saviour, and should both admonish, encourage, and comfort one another with these words. And not to do this, barely to avoid the ridicule of a profane jest, or a blasphemous scoff, or in order to indulge the vices, and procure the countenance of any man or body of men, how great soever, is to betray the cause of Christianity to its enemies in the basest manner, and it is in effect selling our Master at a lower price than even the traitor Judas sold him. And, alas! what would become of such Christians, if it should please God to suffer the enemies of our faith, not only to ridicule, but to persecute the profession of it? What could be expected from them, but that they would, upon the first trial, renounce their religion, and betake themselves to any other which should be safe and in esteem? And yet our great Master assures us, in the words of the text, that *whosoever shall, on any account, deny him before men, shall be denied by him before his Father which is in heaven.* The reason of which will more fully appear if we consider,

II. Secondly, The heinous nature of this sin, which will be evident if we remember that it is a breach of all faith, and of the most solemn engagements with God and man. What can be more solemn, or more obligatory, than the Christian covenant? What can reach the consciences of men, and influence their practice, if such engagements will not? The strictest obligation that can be invented, to bind men to fidelity with one another, is that of an oath; wherein they appeal to God's justice, and invoke his vengeance, if they falsify or deceive; and this we do in a much more solemn and awful manner in our baptismal vows than in any other case whatsoever. For we there not only appeal to the Almighty as a witness of the truth of what we say, or the sincerity of what we promise, but we enter into a covenant in which God himself is a party; we bind ourselves to him, and his religion, in the strictest

manner that words, or vows, or oaths can do; and we appeal to his church, in whose presence we do it, as witnesses to the engagement. Nor does it lessen the obligation that this is done in our infancy; because we renew the same, and make it our own act and deed, in our riper years, both in our confirmation and whenever we partake of the blessed sacrament. And for a Christian, after all this, to renounce his faith, and deny his Saviour, is the most provoking insolence that mortal man can offer to the God that made him; it is affronting the Almighty to his face; and is bidding defiance to his vengeance in so daring and terrible a manner, as must fill serious minds with horror and dread. And with regard to one another, it is appealing to the whole Christian church to prove that nothing can lay any manner of restraint upon them, in whatever they are inclined to do; it is proclaiming to the whole world, that they can break through all obligations, and are not to be bound down by any ties, either civil or sacred. And therefore, the primitive church denied those who apostatized from her the privilege of being accepted as credible witnesses in her courts of judicature; because they had already broke through stronger ties to truth and sincerity than any others that could be laid upon them; and there was no reason but to conclude that they who could, upon any motives, break through them, would make no scruple of despising all other obligations, when their passions or interests should lead them to it.

Again, It is a farther aggravation of this heinous sin, that it generally proceeds from base and unworthy motives; such as lust and intemperance, a love of singularity, or pride and self-conceit. In times of persecution indeed, the sight of racks and gibbets, and the dread of torture and death, or even less grievous sufferings, may terrify weak and tender minds into the performance of what in their hearts they detest and abhor; and both charity and humanity require that great allowances should be made to the weakness and infirmities of human nature in such cases. But when men are at liberty to continue in the profession of their faith with impunity, it is not to be conceived that any thing but a slavery to some lust, interest, or passion, can prompt them

them to renounce and revile a religion so beautiful and lovely in itself, and so strongly proved to come from God; a religion so pure and so peaceable; so full of comfort to each individual, and so beneficial to human society; as that of the blessed Jesus. It is not to be conceived that any thing but the restraints it lays on men's actions and passions can make them enemies to so divine and heavenly an institution; as on the other hand it is not easy for any man to foresee to what lengths in iniquity those passions will carry him if given a loose to, and indulged. Humility, for instance, is the basis of all Christian graces; and pride and self-conceit is the source of the greatest crimes: what will not the vain man do to get rid of so uneasy a restraint as that of being *meek and lowly in heart*? What will he not do, to gain the applause and flatteries of men, and acquire fame and renown for depth and penetration? He will even deny his God and laugh at religion, in order to shew that he can see farther than other men, and to convince the world that he can discover fallacies and deceit in what the rest of mankind highly reverence and esteem. And since his self-sufficiency and pride of heart is as contrary to the laws of God, as theft, lewdness, or deceit, it is consequently as much a crime, and (if the word be rightly understood) as much an immorality as they; and it is an aggravation of the great sin of apostacy, that it often proceeds from base and corrupt motives; it is accumulating crimes, and committing one sin for the sake of another.

Once more, What farther heightens this iniquity is, that it implies as great folly as wickedness: it is giving up what is most valuable and useful in life for nothing, or what is worse than nothing, upon the exchange. True Christianity is the only firm basis on which the soul of man can rest in this vale of misery; the only spring of solid peace and comfort which is afforded us on this side the grave. This, and this only, can make the enjoyments we meet with here rational and manly, and the sufferings easy and supportable. And yet this inestimable jewel is wantonly and foolishly thrown away by the apostate; who can propose nothing in exchange for it but to live and die like the beasts that perish. He can propose nothing more

than to indulge his bestial lusts and appetites while he lives; and to persuade himself that when he dies, he shall perish for ever. And for the sake of this he breaks all faith with God and man; gives up the continual feast of a good conscience; abandons the ineffable comforts vouchsafed to the faithful by the Son and Spirit of God; and relinquishes the joyful and enlivening hopes of eternal glory. Such, I say, is his folly, such his madness, with respect to present life; what he farther hazards, and how much he will suffer hereafter, will appear, if we consider,

III. Thirdly, the great danger of this sin, and the terrible threatenings here denounced against it, that such persons *shall be denied by our blessed Lord before his Father which is in heaven.*

The extreme danger of a state of apostacy appears from hence, that it is very hard to conceive what can bring men who glory in it to repentance, without which there can be no remission. The reason given why the sin against the Holy Ghost is pronounced unpardonable is, that it proceeds from such a perverseness of mind as will not suffer any evidence to convince men of the sinfulness of it; and this holds as strongly in the present case as in any other. And therefore, says the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews, of this very sin of apostacy, *It is impossible* (that is, it is extremely difficult) *for those who were once enlightened, (by baptism,) and have tasted of the heavenly gift, (vouchsafed to them in that sacrament,) and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, and have tasted of the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come, that is, the mighty blessings of the Christian dispensation; it is impossible, if they fall away, from the faith, and renounce it, to renew them again by repentance.* And again, *If we sin wilfully, after we have received the knowledge of the truth, (Heb. x. 26.) that is, if we obstinately and perversely renounce the gospel, after we have embraced it, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sin; we then disclaim the only Mediator between God and man, the Lord Christ Jesus, by whom alone we could obtain remission of sins; and nothing remains but a certain fearful looking-for of judgment, and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries.* What this judgment and fiery indignation will be, may be explained by the

the threatening here denounced, that our Lord will deny such adversaries before his Father which is in heaven.

In which words he seems to allude to the great day of retribution; when, according to the account he himself has been pleased to give us of it, all those whom he shall judge, both quick and dead, shall be either crowned with everlasting happiness, or doomed to eternal misery; according as he shall then confess or deny them. He will then appear, at his second advent, *with power and great glory*; he will appear surrounded with the angels of God, and attended with the host of heaven: this Jesus, who is now despised and vilified by those who once professed his holy name, will appear clothed with omnipotence, majesty, and terror. *Who, says the prophet, may abide the day of his coming? Who shall stand when he appeareth?* (Mal. iii. 2.) *For behold, all the proud, and all that do wickedly, shall be as stubble; and the day that cometh shall burn them up, saith the Lord of hosts.* (iv. 1.) This contemned and abandoned Saviour will then appear in the clouds of heaven, and summon the whole earth in judgment before him; and he will then, *before his heavenly Father*, before the angels, and before men, declare to those who denied him here, *Depart from me, ye wicked, I know you not: depart, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels.*

Thus have I endeavoured to shew what is meant by denying our blessed Lord before men; the heinous nature of that sin; and the mighty danger, and most terrible consequences that will infallibly attend it. And I shall now, in the

IV. Fourth and last place, conclude with an inference or two, by way of application; and the first is,

That we be not discouraged, or led into any doubts or fears concerning our holy religion, by the open apostacy and profaneness of those among us who renounce, ridicule, and blaspheme it. They fight against God, who will perform his promises; and they fulfil the holy scriptures whilst they revile them. The sacred writers forewarn us, that *in the last days shall come scoffers, walking after their own lusts, and denying the Lord that bought them.* But, alas! *against whom do they exalt themselves, and lift up their voice on high? even against that Jesus who is ex-*

alted to the right hand of God; angels, principalities, and powers being made subject unto him. Against him do they utter vain words, who died to save them from destruction; and who will be the present strength, and the future salvation of every soul that trusteth still upon him. These attempts shew the malice and wickedness of men; but impeach not either the truth or the power of God. Christianity is not at all the less true because they forsake and revile it; neither is the vengeance or faithfulness of God the less certain, because he *bears long with them.* On the contrary, we ought, as St. Peter directs, *to account that the long-suffering of our Lord is salvation.* (2 Pet. iii. 15.) It is designed for the edification of his church, and it should strengthen our faith, and confirm our confidence in him, *lest we also fall from our own steadfastness.* Many gracious designs of Providence are answered by it; one of which is, *that they which are approved may be made manifest among us.* And therefore the proper use to be made of it is,

2dly and lastly, To be led thereby to be the more open, resolute, and constant, in the defence and profession of the gospel. We have now an opportunity of approving our sincerity in our holy religion, by shewing that we are not ashamed of a reviled and crucified Saviour. The time is *a time of reproach, rebuke, and blasphemy*; and it is therefore the indispensable duty of every faithful Christian to shew himself such with constancy and courage. It is his duty to be more than ordinarily diligent, in frequenting the public offices of the church; and to shew his zeal and love for his Redeemer by joining in all the parts of them, and confessing his Lord *before men*, in the most public manner. It is his duty, in whatever station, to do all that in him lies to put a stop to the infidelity of the age, and to free himself from any share in the guilt, I had almost said the unpardonable guilt of it, by an open disavowal and discountenance.

And for our encouragement in this, let us look forward to that great and dreadful day of our Lord's second coming, *wherein the heavens shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat*; when that Jesus, who is now the object of men's reproach and blasphemy, shall repay vengeance to his enemies; and shall crown every faithful Christian *with honour, glory,*

and immortality: that as we have embraced, we may ever hold fast that blessed hope of everlasting life which is given us through his great atonement and powerful mediation and intercession.

SERMON CXLVII.

Human Happiness and Improvement to be derived from Divine Grace, or the Operation of the Holy Ghost.

2 COR. iii. 5.

Our sufficiency is of God.

THE great apostle of the gentiles seems immediately to allude in this place to the extraordinary gifts communicated to him, in his conversion to the faith of Christ, and the execution of his ministry; to his having received the gospel by immediate inspiration, and preached it with great confidence and success; and hereby strictly to signify, that, as to all his wisdom, and knowledge, and utterance, and success, *he was not sufficient of himself to think or do any thing, as of himself, but his sufficiency, as to all these things, was of God, who had made him an able minister of the New Testament.* But this, though allowed to be a just interpretation, and to give us the true and immediate meaning of St. Paul, as his sense is here confined by the context, yet will by no means lead us to the full extent of his expression, as it is explained in other passages of scripture, unless we carry its signification from the writer of this Epistle to all those Corinthians to whom it was written, and from them to all true and faithful Christians in all ages of the church: for of them it is and always will be true, as much as it was of St. Paul, that their *sufficiency is of God*; that as well their ordinary as his extraordinary powers are all derived from the same fountain of grace and mercy, and are sent down from heaven; that their adherence to the faith, amidst the cavils and revilings of unbelievers, as well as his conversion to it, is derived from and to be ascribed to a divine light vouchsafed them from above; and that as he could not speak with tongues and work miracles, so neither can they subdue sin and work out righteousness without the powerful assistance of the Holy Ghost. This our apostle himself declares in the last verses of this chapter: for as

he begins it with observing that the conversion of his Corinthians was owing to the Holy Spirit, or, in his own words, that they were *his epistle, written not with ink, but with the spirit of the living God*; so he concludes it with ascribing all the liberty of Christians from the bondage or corruption of sin, and all the gradual illuminations of their minds with divine truths, to the blessed influences of the same Holy Spirit: *Where the spirit of the Lord is, there is, and indeed there only is, liberty. And we all with open face beholding, as in a glass, the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image, from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.* That is, whatever progress we or you make in our Christian calling; whatever influence our clear-knowledge of the glory of our Lord, or of the wonders of his incarnation, and sufferings, and powers, may have upon our lives, in transforming us into a likeness to him, and leading us on from one degree of Christian perfection or glory to another; all this is to be ascribed to the same Spirit of the Lord. For whether we understand the words of the preachers, or only of the believers, or of both, it is plain St. Paul imputes the success of all, as well the faith and virtues of the one as the abilities and zeal of the other, to the Spirit; and declares *our sufficiency*, in either view, to be of the Holy Ghost, that is, *of God*. Understanding therefore the words of the text in this latitude, I propose to treat of them in this method:

I. To shew what this sufficiency is.

II. To shew that it is a sufficiency, that is, implies as great an ability as can ever be wanted by any Christian, in any place and at any time; and is extended to all who seek and embrace it.

III. That this sufficiency is not of ourselves, but the *gift of God*.

IV. That it is no more than a sufficiency, and does neither exclude our own co-operation with it, nor act irresistibly upon us.

I. The first thing is to shew what this sufficiency is; by which I understand, all the inward and divine influences and comforts of God's preventing, assisting, and confirming grace; all those secret operations of the Holy Ghost upon the minds of men, whereby the sincere and humble enquirer after God is enabled to conquer his prejudices, and left open to receive conviction;

conviction; whereby, upon his embracing the faith, he is enabled to discern those *spiritual things* which are only to be *spiritually discerned*; whereby he is animated to pursue his warfare by inward *joy and peace in believing*; whereby, in the pursuit of it, he is either not permitted to be led into temptation, or powerfully delivered from the evil of it, and enabled to do good; and whereby all the various wants and necessities of the faithful in all ages are supplied, strength is vouchsafed to the weak, comfort to the feeble-minded, steadiness and assurance to the doubtful, and perseverance to the strong. All these effects and comforts are ascribed in holy writ to one and the same Spirit, who, as he did at the first publication of the gospel, divide his miraculous powers, so he now does these, to *every man severally as he willeth*. Which vouchsafements are called the grace or free gift of God, with respect to our utter inability to purchase or deserve it; and are, for their plenty and perpetual supplies, compared to *rivers of living water*. And that we are thus illuminated, assisted, directed, prevented, confirmed, and comforted, in our advancement in our heavenly calling, is as certain as that the scriptures are the word of God, and the author of them can neither ascribe effects to wrong causes, nor make use of words without a meaning. If *no man can say that Jesus is the Lord but by the Holy Ghost*, then he that does say it, and believe in him as such, is enabled to do so by that blessed Spirit. If *he that has not the spirit of Christ is none of his*, then all that are his, all that receive his doctrines, and obey his commands, have that spirit in them. If *all goodness, righteousness, truth, long-suffering, gentleness, faith, meekness and temperance, are the fruits of the Spirit*, then all these graces and virtues are to be ascribed to him whose secret operations produce them in us. If *our abounding in hope, and being filled with all joy and peace in believing*, be with our apostle to be ascribed to the *power of the Holy Ghost*, all then, who are blessed with these inward comforts, are indebted to him for those early foretastes of future glory which animate them in their pursuits after an heavenly kingdom. In short, if to *walk by the Spirit*, and to be *led by the Spirit*, have any proper meaning; if the Spirit's *dwelling in us*, and our being

the temples of the Holy Ghost, have any signification; these expressions must imply his continual presence with us, and assistance to us; his being the foundation and principle of our spiritual life; that he does strengthen our weakness, and invigorate our minds: and that his operations and influences on our faculties and inclinations are certain and effectual, how secret or how undiscernable soever. That he who formed the mind of man, and first endowed it with its wonderful powers, may and can find access to it by infinite ways to us unknown and undiscernable; that he may communicate himself to it through secret channels which are to us past finding out, is not to be denied by any who acknowledge his almighty power, and allow the soul to be the workmanship of his hands: and that he actually does so convey himself to us, has been shewn to be matter of express revelation. To question the reality of these influences, because we are ignorant of the manner of their conveyance, is no better reasoning, no juster inference, than it were to conclude that the wind actually does not blow, because we *know not whence it cometh, or whither it goeth*: so that the pride of man is to be humbled, and the goodness of God magnified in every step from our conversion to our final perfection; every triumph over temptation, and every improvement in righteousness, is to be attributed to him *who worketh in us to will and to do of his good pleasure*, that is, who, of his own free grace and pleasure, without any merit on our side, empowers us first to conquer the perverseness of our wills, and then to walk on resolutely in the paths of piety; we are humbly and thankfully to acknowledge, that by *grace we are what we are*, that *without him we could do nothing*, and consequently, that *all our sufficiency is of God*.

II. The second particular proposed, is to shew that the assistances we receive from him are a sufficiency; that is, imply as great abilities as can be wanted by any Christian, at any time and in any place, and are extended to all Christians who diligently seek and embrace them.

The former of these truths, that these assistances are sufficient, that is, adequate to the wants and necessities of all Christians in all ages, is from hence evident, that if they were defective in weight or

number, either our blessed Lord must want power to do what he has promised, or else he has promised what he will not perform. But, *all power is given unto him, both in heaven and earth*, nothing therefore can be too strong for him: *God is righteous in all his ways, and holy in all his works*, therefore none of his words can be vain, none of his declarations fall to the ground without their completion. His omnipotence then implies, that nothing can be too hard for him; his veracity and faithfulness import, that he cannot deceive us. To question the former were to make him no God; and to deny the latter, were to make him a liar, and not to have his truth in us. The promises therefore of our Lord to his church must be sure and unalterable; and these promises are, that they that *believe in him shall not be ashamed*; that they *who ask shall receive*; that they *who diligently seek him shall find him*; that he will not *leave his children comfortless, or forsake them*, but lead and conduct them as the good shepherd does his flock; that he will be with his church, as the head is with the body, deriving nourishment and strength to all the parts of it, and that *even to the end of the world*. Vain and impious then are all our attempts to acquit ourselves of the guilt of sin, by charging it upon our own weakness, or the strength of temptation. This is charging God foolishly, inasmuch as it is in effect making him and his providence the cause of our iniquities. No impieties will ever be laid to our charge by a righteous Being which it was never in our power to avoid; no punishment be finally and ultimately inflicted upon us by a just Judge for crimes not wilfully committed. But nevertheless we are certain all sin is, or will be, punished with great severity by the most perfect of all Beings; and consequently that it is all founded in our own neglect, or obstinacy, or perverseness, without which it would not be imputed to us. *If then we want strength, and have it not, it is either because we labour not, or ask not. If we ask and receive not, it is because we ask amiss.* So that *God is true, and every such man a liar: he will be justified in his sayings, and clear when impartially judged.*

The other part of this second particular, that as the assistances of divine grace

are sufficient to enable us to do all things required of us, through Christ who strengthens us; so, that this strength is actually conveyed and granted to all Christians who diligently seek and embrace it, and not confined to any particular set or number of them, may, I think, be evident from these considerations.

1. That our Lord and Saviour died for all.

2. That the exhortations, the threatenings, and the promises of the gospel, are general, and applied to all.

3. That God is no respecter of persons. And,

4. That he wills not that any should perish. (2 Pet. iii. 9.)

1. The first proof is, that our Lord and Saviour died for all, and therefore all who are equally faithful and penitent, that is, who are so to the utmost of their power, will receive the benefits of his death. *If any man sin*, says St. John, *we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous, and he is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world.* Now, one advantage of this propitiation must be, that by means of it we are not only forgiven past sins upon repentance, but likewise enabled to avoid future ones (so far at least as is necessary to salvation) by divine grace: for without this the reconciliation would be vain and ineffectual, and indeed, as to any valuable purpose, no reconciliation at all: for it is much the same thing to a man, if he must be condemned to eternal punishment, whether it be for crimes committed towards the beginning of his life, or at the end of it; and to forgive him the one, without enabling him to avoid the other, is rather sporting with his misery than relieving it. The merits of Christ's sufferings then must extend farther than barely obtaining remission for past sins, since they would prove abortive in themselves, and of little use to us, unless they did so. And if they have likewise purchased such supplies of grace as are necessary for our advancement in our spiritual warfare, those supplies must then be granted to all those for whom those sufferings were undergone. Now the apostle St. John plainly asserts, that Christ is a *propitiation for the sins of the whole world*; and consequently has suffered

ferred for all; and if he has suffered for all, then the merits of those sufferings must be applied to all, or else his death cannot answer the end of it; and if the merits of his sufferings are to be applied to all, then must sufficient measures of divine grace be likewise distributed to all, who perform the conditions necessary to entitle them to this redemption, that is, who stedfastly believe in him, and, as far as in them lies, repent of their sins, and forsake them. For, on the other hand, *if the gifts our Lord and Master received, after he had led captivity captive*, which are the gifts of the Holy Ghost, be given only to a few men, and consequently, they only are enabled to discharge their duty as they ought, then is the death of Christ, by which these gifts of Christ were purchased, effectual only to that few; since they only receive such helps from it as empower them to perform their duty, in such a manner as is necessary to their eternal salvation. The consequence of which is, that he is in reality no propitiation for the rest, that is, the greatest part of Christians; his propitiation being no propitiation to them who are not delivered by it. But an apostle declares this was a propitiation for all, and his assertion must be true; and consequently that which is contradictory to it must necessarily be false.

2. Another reason why sufficient measures of divine grace are conveyed to all Christians is this, that the exhortations, the promises, and the threatenings in scripture are general, and applied to all. All men are called upon to turn unto the Lord: the apostles in their preaching and writings exhorted all who heard them, and admonish all to whom those writings come, to believe and repent. Now either these exhortations and admonitions are designed to answer some good end, or they are not: if they are not, to what purpose were they written, and with so much care communicated to the world? and if they are, they must be very ill adapted to the procuring such an end, unless they are to be applied to all, or there were some clear marks of distinction given us in these writings, whereby we might know to whom they do, and to whom they do not belong. For as long as such marks of distinction are wanting, and it continues uncertain to whom the admonition is applied, every

man is at liberty to say it does not affect him, and thereby to render the word of God of none effect. A human lawgiver would make statutes to very little purpose, if he were only to enact that some of his subjects were to obey them, without declaring who those subjects were. And in like manner, it would much less suit the wisdom of the supreme God, to exhort, that is, command all his creatures to obey him, when he intended only some few should, and did not clearly distinguish those few from the rest. For to command every body when all are not enabled to obey, and none can know who is, is indeed to command nobody. If then the admonitions in scripture were not intended to be applied to all, we should doubtless have been taught to distinguish those for whom they were intended from those for whom they were not. And as we nowhere meet with any such distinction, and are at the same time told, that the scripture is *profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for instruction, and for correction in righteousness*, we must therefore conclude that they belong to all; and if they belong and are profitable to all, all must be able to receive and obey their admonitions; but this cannot be without the divine assistance, and therefore that assistance must be granted to all without distinction.

Again, As the exhortations in scripture are general, so are the promises. *Come unto me*, says our most gracious Master, *all ye that labour, and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me, for I am meek and lowly in heart; and ye shall find rest to your souls: for my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.* Again, *If I be lifted up from the earth, I will draw all men unto me.* And again, *He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved.* Now what comfort and advantage can accrue to men from these declarations, or what wise and good purpose can it answer for God to make them, if the promised happiness be out of their reach? Is it any advantage to a man to be told, that the joys of heaven are inexpressibly great, if it is out of his power to attain them? Might not these promises have as well been spared, if mankind in general are not the better for them? And indeed, how can these declarations themselves be true,

true, unless understood in their most natural and extensive signification? Is that yoke easy which is too hard to be borne; or that burden light which men cannot support? Can the weary and heavy laden find any rest to their souls, without being able to throw off the load which so heavily oppresses them? Or can they do more than exert their utmost endeavours to remove it? Can Christ in any sense be said to draw all men to him, if he only draws some, and those a very few with respect to the bulk of human race? Or is it to any purpose to tell men they shall be saved if they believe, when it is not in their power to believe? If not, the honour of our Lord and his religion, nay, and even his veracity, make it necessary to understand his promises in the full latitude of his expressions. Should an earthly prince promise his subject, who was loaded with chains and shut up in prison, an immense reward to go on some embassy for him, without beating off his chains and opening the prison doors, he would justly be thought rather to abuse and insult the wretch in his sufferings than to do him service. And the case is the same with respect to the promises of the gospel, if men have not power enough communicated to them, to make it their own choice if they reject them. Men should therefore be exceeding cautious how they confine the grace of God to themselves, or to any determinate set of men, lest they reflect dishonour and falsehood on Christianity itself, and indeed sap the foundations of all true religion.

The case is likewise the same as to the threatenings of the gospel. Is it consistent with the mercy and love of the Christian dispensation to declare, that vengeance shall overtake the sinners, and that *they who have done evil shall arise to the resurrection of damnation*, if they have not sufficient grace afforded them to forsake the sin, and avoid the punishment? What other tendency can such denunciations have than to add one misery no other, uselessly to increase terror, and to make bad men desperate. Or can wicked men repent without the grace of God? If not, we must allow them to have such measures of it conveyed to them as will remove their natural incapacity; or else the consequence will plainly be this, that we must change the most gracious invitations into imperious insults, merciful

forewarnings into cruelty and oppression, and the truth of God into a lie. But,

3dly, We are likewise told in scripture that *God is no respecter of persons, but in every nation he that feareth God, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him*. St. Peter, indeed, speaks this in direct allusion to the distinctions established by God himself between Jews and Gentiles. But is not the assertion equally true, or rather ought it not, with more reason, to be applied to all the private members of the Christian church, who are all entered into the same covenant with him, and he with them? If he has broken down the partition wall between Jew and Gentile by the gospel, can he have erected a greater between Christian and Christian? Or, can he, with any truth, be said to have no respect to persons, if he vouchsafes his grace to some, and denies it to others, of the same communion, without any regard to their personal conduct or qualifications? If one man is enabled to do his duty, and made happy for performing it; another is not enabled to do his, and yet is made miserable for not doing it; is not great respect shewn to the person of the one, and, to say no worse, none to the other? If these different allotments indeed proceed from the obedience of the one and the disobedience of the other, as they most certainly will, the reason and equity of them will be very evident; but then it will likewise be as evident, that they both must have been enabled to do their duty; since no act of either could be either virtuous or vicious, unless it were matter of choice. And if both acted freely, and out of choice, then the disobedient, as well as the obedient, must have had just measures of divine grace allotted him, to counterbalance that natural depravity and those corrupt inclinations, which no power of his own could remove, and put him, if I may so speak, in *equilibrio*, between virtue and vice, and leave him free to pursue either.

4thly, and lastly, I observe, that we are likewise told in scripture, that *God wills not that any should perish*; how then can he deny any man those spiritual assistances without which he cannot discharge his duty, and consequently must perish, whether he will or no? If his destruction be not owing to himself, it must be merely the good-will and pleasure

sure of him that made him. And how then can he be said *not to will* that destruction? Most assuredly the apostle's meaning must be, that he does not so will it as to make it his own act and deed; but so relieves the natural wants of men as to enable them to avoid it, and leave them without excuse if they run into it; so as to deal out his mercies with an equal hand, and to demonstrate that *he doth not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men*; but is the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort; is gracious, long-suffering, and of great goodness, to all his people; and will make this equal rule the standard of his dealings with us, that finally and ultimately *the righteousness of the righteous shall be upon him, and the wickedness of the wicked upon him*.

To conclude then, unless we can make the death of the Son of God defective and ineffectual, or the great Head of his church himself impotent and unfaithful; unless we can think the exhortations of the gospel vain words, its enlivening promises insults on the miseries of wretched men, its awakening threatenings cruelty and aggravation; unless we can imagine the great God partial in his dispensations, and the Author of all being delighted with the eternal destruction of his creatures; blasphemies almost too horrible to be mentioned; we must conclude that the spiritual advantages of the gospel are distributed with an equal and bountiful hand; that the glorious Author of our salvation, sends his Comforter to every member of his body; and not only enables, but graciously moves and excites, them to obey his will; and that the only difference between the good and the bad, with respect to him, is this, that the latter oppose, reject, and *grieve the Holy Spirit*, till they provoke him to leave them; the former embrace, cherish, and obey, his benign influences, his most salutary suggestions, and therefore *he takes up his abode with them*.

In a word, great are the mercies of our God, great the comforts of the gospel of Christ, and great therefore ought to be our acknowledgments and gratitude for them. *O let us magnify the Lord together, and praise his name for ever and ever. Let every soul give thanks unto him, and praise his name for ever and ever. What is man, O God, that thou*

shouldst thus magnify him, and that thou shouldst set thine heart upon him; that thou shouldst visit him every morning, and try him every moment!

The Divine Spirit is ever present with us, in all our difficulties and temptations, to check, restrain, and stop us, in our pursuit of sin and death; to enable, animate, and quicken us, to walk in the paths of holiness, and attain honour, glory, and immortality. Let every man therefore labour very earnestly to give a welcome reception to this heavenly guest, by attending to and obeying his merciful dictates. Let every man tremble at the apprehensions of being forsaken by him, and be horribly afraid of provoking him to leave him destitute, and thereby seal him over to the day of condemnation. Let it be matter of daily prayer with us to intreat God (as our excellent liturgy directs us to do) that he would not take his Holy Spirit from us: and if our iniquities have provoked him to withdraw himself from any of us, let us implore him, for his dear Son's sake, *to give us the comforts of his help again, and stablish us with his free Spirit*.

S E R M O N CXLVIII.

Our Sufficiency the Gift of God's Grace.

2 COR. iii. 5.

Our sufficiency is of God.

IN order clearly to state the doctrines of Christianity concerning Divine Grace, and open the foundations and principles upon which they are built; and in order to remove those difficulties concerning it which might give disturbance to weak, or encouragement to wicked men; I proposed, in speaking to these words of St. Paul, to pursue this method:

I. To shew what the sufficiency he speaks of is.

II. To shew that it is a sufficiency; that is, implies as great an ability as can ever be wanted by any Christian, in any place or time, and is actually extended to all Christians who seek and embrace it.

III. That this sufficiency is not of ourselves, but is the *gift of God*. And,

IV. That it is no more than a sufficiency, and does neither exclude our

own co-operation with it, nor act irresistibly upon us.

This sufficiency may very justly be explained, consistently with other scriptures, and this very epistle of St. Paul himself, to mean, as well the ordinary as extraordinary gifts of the Holy Ghost, and to signify God's preventing, assisting, and confirming grace. And that he does so prevent, assist, and confirm us, in the performance of our duty, I endeavoured to shew to be the plain and constant doctrine of the holy scriptures, from their ascribing all faith and virtue to the Divine Spirit, and their declaring all good men possessed of such benefits as they cannot be said to have in any other sense; since they can in no other proper sense be said either to walk by the Spirit, or be led by him; either to have *the Spirit dwelling in them*, or to be *the temples of the Holy Ghost*.

That these divine assistances are in themselves sufficient, that is, equal to the wants of all Christians in all ages of the church, I endeavoured to evince from the consideration of the divine omnipotence, and from this reflection, that if they were deficient in weight or number, our Lord would either want fidelity or power to perform what he has promised; but *all power is given unto him in heaven and in earth*, nothing therefore can be too hard for him; *he is very faithful who has promised*, and therefore none of his words can fall to the ground.

And that this sufficiency is, in fact, universally vouchsafed to all the members of Christ's church, without distinction, I thought very evident from these considerations, that our Lord and Saviour died for all; that the exhortations, the threatenings, and the promises of the gospel, are general and applied to all; that *God is no respecter of persons*; and that *he wills not that any should perish*: because it would offer great force and violence to the natural meaning and construction of words, to explain these open declarations of scripture in any other sense; and because it would be very difficult, if not impossible, to reconcile them to truth, much less to the divine attributes, if understood otherwise than in their full, natural, and most extensive signification.

And taking it for granted then, that these heavenly influences are shed down upon us, and that in so general, impartial, and diffusive a manner; the next inquiry is, how far we are affected by them, and in what manner our progress in our duty is to be imputed to them.—Which leads me to shew, in the

III. Third place, That this sufficiency is not of ourselves, but is *the gift of God*.

In proof of which I might, I presume, with great confidence, appeal to the experience of all wise and considerate men, to shew how little sufficient they are of themselves to do any thing, much less all things the law of God requires, in the perfect manner that law demands, as of themselves; I might refer myself to the breast of every sincere and impartial man to declare, what clouds of darkness and ignorance surround his understanding, and how liable he is to errors and mistakes; which errors in judgment must necessarily produce others in practice; how little able he is to resist the fury of impetuous passions, which raise tempests in the soul, and hurry him, like a torrent, into the most daring iniquities; how open and ready he is to embrace the flattering pleasures of sin; and how unwilling to enter, how weak and unable to pursue, the rugged paths of duty and obedience. That this is man's natural state, has been the constant and universal complaint of all good men in all ages; and the uniform, and, if I may so speak, regular pursuit of iniquity in the bad, has yet more plainly proved it, how little soever they themselves may have attended to it. The serious and thinking part of mankind, of whatever denomination in point of religion, have been sensible of it; and both Jews and Gentiles, as well as Christians, have lamented it. The royal psalmist declares his conviction, that he was *born in wickedness*, and that *in sin his mother conceived him*; and applies earnestly to heaven, as the only means, *to wash him thoroughly from his wickedness, and effectually cleanse him from his sin*. The divine Plato has recourse to supernatural aids for the cure of his natural weakness, and his advancements in virtue; and ascribes both to the heavenly assistance of his demon, or genius, or angel, who attended him. And the great

master of the schools was so sensible of his depravity, that he was forced to have recourse to a sort of double nature in the soul to account for it. He declared there was an irrational as well as a rational part in the soul, and that the former, meaning our lusts and passions, was ever fighting against reason. And, indeed, what are the records of time, but monuments of the corruption and wickedness of mankind? What are the several histories of the several ages and nations in the world, but one uniform demonstration, that *the minds of men, when left to themselves, are fully set in them to do evil; and that the heart of man is so very deceitful, and desperately wicked, that it is very hard even to know it?* And what are the few great and good, who appear in story, and shine with such exceeding splendour, amidst the degeneracy and depravity of their fellow-creatures, but evidences of the interposal of some extraordinary powers to enable them to go so much out of the common road, rather than any testimony of their natural power and ability, to walk in the deserted paths of real honour, virtue, and religion? So that I might with safety appeal to every man's experience, to shew, whether he be able of himself to perform the will of God, and arrive at perfection; whether universal charity, purity, and the love of God, be not rather distasteful things to the natural man; whether he has strength enough of his own to resist and overcome all temptations to the contrary; and whether all his ability and sufficiency, if he gains ground in this steep and difficult road, be not, on the contrary, derived down to him from above? But I choose rather to establish Christian doctrines on the infallible word of God, which is a more stable foundation than any experience or observation of weak and fallible men.

Now the account the holy scriptures give us of this matter is this: they declare our natural weakness great, and by us unfurmountable; they ascribe our conversion to, and progress in, our duty, to the Holy Ghost; and they command us to have continual recourse to God, for succour in all our spiritual conflicts and temptations.

Our blessed Lord declares, that our natural weakness in spiritual things is too great for us to conquer, in very plain

words, when he says, *As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me: I am the vine, ye are the branches: without me ye can do nothing.* What are the fruits here meant but those of holiness and charity? And if we are as unable of ourselves to bring forth these, as the plant is to bear fruit without the assistance of the root, from whence all its sap and nourishment is derived, what becomes of our natural powers to discharge our duty? St. Paul, describing his natural state, says, *the good that I would, I do not; and that evil that I would not, that I do.* And when, out of a deep sense of his depravity, he cries out, *O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from this body of death?* He replies in the next verse, that the power to do this was only to be had from heaven, and that through the propitiation of the gospel. *I thank God,* says he, or, as others read it, "the grace of God," *through Jesus Christ, our Lord.*

Again, *Except ye be born of water, and of the Spirit, ye cannot enter into the kingdom of God;* but we know all, who perform their duty as they ought, will enter into the kingdom of God: none therefore can return to that duty, and discharge it, without being so born. *Peace,* says St. Paul, *be with the brethren, and love with faith, from God the Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ.* But why love and faith from God the Father, and from our Lord Jesus Christ, if we can turn to God and love him with all our hearts, souls, and strengths, of our own natural ability? The blessed Jesus, and his apostle then, declare that we are indebted to the Holy Ghost for the love which is shed abroad in our hearts, and that it is he who worketh in us to will and to do.

Again, *Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation: The Spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.—God will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able, but will, with the temptation, also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it.—When ye pray, say,—Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.* Now what occasion for this application to Heaven, if we can do without it? What necessity for God's making a way for us to escape, if we can make it without his aid? Or why are we to apply to him to deliver us from evil, if we can deliver

deliver ourselves? Either therefore his assistance is necessary, or these petitions are vain; either his help is absolutely wanted, or we are taught to mock him. And, indeed, what can have been the necessity even of the death and mediation of the Son of God, if we can so independently keep God's commandments, as not to stand in need of his extraordinary vouchsafements; and so uprightly, as not to want a reconciliation.

But to this it is objected, if then God's commandments are too pure, our natural corruption too great, and our power too weak, to keep them; God then commands what is impossible, and if he requires impossibilities of us, he is not only an hard taskmaster, but an unjust one.

To which it is answered, that a due consideration and right understanding of God's dispensations with us, will evidently shew that neither his justice nor his wisdom are impeached, by his setting before us so pure and perfect a rule as we are utterly unable of ourselves to live up to. His justice is cleared, let our defects be what they will, if he has appointed a method of supplying them. Besides, let our transgressions be ever so certain and necessary, we can lay nothing to the charge of God's infinite justice, unless pain and misery be as certainly the consequence and punishment of them. To make us suffer indeed for what we cannot help, is, according to the best notions we can form of it, strictly unjust; it is treating men as if they were what they are not; as if they were really guilty of crimes which they cannot be guilty of, without a power to prevent them. But either to punish us for what we can help; or to propose a law too pure for us to obey, provided that obedience be not made the condition of our acceptance or rejection, is no breach of the laws of justice, because it is only treating us as what we are; it is considering us as criminal only in such a manner, and to such a degree, as we are such. If we can prevent sin, and are punished for it, we have the just rewards of our iniquity; and though we cannot prevent it, yet if we are not punished for it, the purity of the law does by no means imply injustice in the lawgiver or his dispensations; since if we are not the better for that purity, so neither are we the worse; for if we

are not the worse for it, how are we injured by it? And if we are not injured by it, as having no more misery inflicted on us than is our due, this is but strictly just. So that the essence of injustice consists not in proposing a pure and perfect law, but in punishing us for any thing out of our power; which it is certain God cannot do, since he has declared he will reward and punish every man only according to his works.

And as to our ability to do our duty, the divine justice is equally cleared, though we are punished for our sins, whether that ability proceeds from nature or grace, provided we only have it. If God enables us to do our duty (whether by natural or supernatural means, it matters not) and we will not perform it, we are still guilty. And the gospel nowhere supposes us unable to do what is required of us in general; but, on the contrary, engages for such supplies of grace as are necessary for us. The only difference is, that it ascribes not our strength to nature but to religion. It does not absolutely deprive us of all power to obey its precepts, but only ascribes it to a different cause. And as then it is still supposed that we are able to live as we ought, the divine justice is equally cleared, in the punishment of our iniquities, by whatever means that power be conveyed to us: the manner of the conveyance does not alter the nature of the thing. It is our having it or not having it, which makes the penalty just or unjust; and not the immediate cause from whence it springs. So that the Christian doctrine of divine grace, and our having a sufficiency only from God, does no more impeach the justice of God in our condemnation, than the doctrines of a natural strength and power would do, since it equally supposes us enabled to do what is required of us, though not the same way. And since it has been shewn these supplies of grace are sufficient for all, and conveyed to all, all may therefore be with as much justice condemned for not doing their duty now, as if their power had proceeded immediately from themselves.

And the divine Wisdom, in his setting this perfect law of liberty before us, will abundantly appear, if we consider the many good effects our knowledge of it naturally tends to produce in us. It shews us, that we ought to be ever going

on in our way to perfection, and never faint or be weary in our minds; that we ought not to content ourselves with any spiritual attainments, since they are at best so few and so small, but still be pressing forward towards the high mark of our calling. By thus convincing us of our defects, the divine goodness takes the most effectual means to mortify and subdue our pride, and to teach us to humble ourselves in the sight of God, and to be meek and lowly in heart. Our wants likewise demonstrate our absolute dependance upon heaven, and the necessity of having daily recourse to the throne of grace for relief and comfort. And as our depravity and corruption evince our want of a mediator, since we are thus utterly incapable of reconciling ourselves; the stronger the light is in which the scriptures represent that depravity, the more forcibly do they draw us to admire the depth of the riches of the goodness of God, and to place all our confidence in his sufferings, who died and rose again for our justification. A dispensation then so fruitful in good works must be both wise in itself, and gracious to us. So that neither the divine justice nor wisdom are impeached by the apostle's doctrine, that our sufficiency is all of God; but his goodness is magnified, as in granting this sufficiency, so likewise in making us sensible of our want of it.

Again; It is likewise objected to this doctrine of grace, that if God does all, then man can do nothing; and consequently the man becomes a mere machine, and all the freedom of his actions, all the liberty of his will, is lost and destroyed. But this is a consequence by no means chargeable on the sacred writings without the utmost injustice; and to remove it I therefore proceed to the

IV. Fourth particular I proposed to speak to; which was, to shew that the sufficiency our apostle speaks of, is no more than a sufficiency, and does neither exclude our own co-operation with it, nor act irresistibly upon us. Which I apprehend will evidently appear to be the plain doctrine of the scriptures from these considerations:—that the scriptures every where call upon us to co-operate with this grace, even where they most highly magnify it; and that they most expressly

declare it to be in our power to resist it.

Nothing can be plainer than that the holy scriptures every where call upon us to repent, and to do all good works, for far at least as is necessary for us, which supposes a power in us to do, or not to do it; and nowhere more remarkably than in the passage where St. Paul gives us the most lofty notion of the efficacy of grace, and at the same time makes use of that as an argument for our own co-operation with it, or rather for our own full discharge of all our duty. *Work out, says he, your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God that worketh in you to will and to do.* (Phil. ii. 12, 13.) Not as we render it, *of his good pleasure*, and, as some understand it, as if this *working in us* were arbitrary or humourous, or partial, conveyed to some and not to all, and to the same man sometimes, and at other times not, as an arbitrary will shall dictate, but of his mere benevolence and goodness to you. The words are only, *ὁ θεὸς τῆς ἐνδοξίας*, for, or on account of good-will, namely, to all the body of Christians in general. For in this sense the apostle's reasoning is very just and conclusive, which otherwise it is not. If God, of his own free grace and good-will towards us, enables us all by his assistance to do that duty, and attain that happiness, which otherwise we could not perform or obtain; this is a very cogent and forcible reason why we should exert our utmost endeavours, and be the more strictly vigilant in the use of that assistance, for fear of offending such unmerited and infinite goodness, and with tremblings at the thoughts and apprehensions of having these merciful dispensations withdrawn from us. But if either these powers are conveyed unequally and imperfectly, or when conveyed do not actually influence the mind with a force irresistible, the uncertainty and inequality then of this distribution is rather a reason why we should have little regard for our salvation, as not knowing how far, or whether at all, our diligence will promote it; and this compulsion is a direct and irrefragable argument why we should absolutely neglect our salvation, since, in that case, all our labours must be vain and of no effect. So that, if we will allow our apostle to reason justly, we must suppose

pose that the operations of divine grace are general, and vouchsafed to all Christians, and that they are no more than sufficient; that is, that they assist the will, and not destroy it, but leave us at our full liberty to embrace or to reject them, and thereby to *work out our own salvation* or damnation. And indeed this is everywhere the general voice of the sacred writings. As it is very certain, in point of reason, that whoever destroys the liberty of the will, leaves no room for exhortation or threatening, merit or guilt, reward or punishment; so it is no less evident, in point of fact, that the scriptures everywhere suppose and assert that liberty. Since, as on the one hand, they exhort us to co-operate with divine grace, which implies that we must and can act with it; so, on the other, they expressly assert, that we can resist it, and consequently, that it does not act with force and compulsion upon us.

Ye do always resist the Holy Ghost, says St. Stephen, to the stubborn Jews; *as your fathers did, so do ye.* (Acts, vii. 51.) *Quench not the Spirit*, says St. Paul to his Thessalonians (1 Thess. v. 19.); and to his Ephesians, *Grieve not the holy spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption.* (Eph. iv. 30.) This is plainly asserting, that as the operations of divine grace and dispensations of the Holy Ghost were resistible under the Jewish dispensation, so they likewise are under the Christian: that this fire from heaven does not burn with such fury but that we may or may not quench it; and that we are not so absolutely sealed over to the day of our redemption, but that it is still in our power so to grieve the holy spirit of God, by acting contrary to his will, as to force him to leave us, and thereby seal us over to the day of condemnation.

Does then the gospel destroy the freedom of man's will? It establishes and it confirms it. It indeed supposes men in their natural state not in a free condition with respect to spiritual things; but then it undertakes for a removal of all the obstructions, and a supply of all the defects, which occasion that want of freedom, and engages to place him in a state of perfect liberty. The powers of grace are declared not to interfere with, but to complete and perfect the powers of the mind: not to weaken or bear down the faculties, but to strengthen and restore them to

their original freedom. So that the divine lawgivers, as well as human ones, suppose the necessity of man's being a free agent, in order to his being subject to their commands; and the only difference is, that men ascribe that freedom to nature, the apostles to the *gifts of the Holy Ghost*. Both agree in the necessity of the thing, though they derive it from different causes. What man calls his own power, the scriptures call the *power* and the *gift of God*; because without his gracious assistance, which is freely given unto us through the merits of the blessed Jesus, we could not arrive at that power of acting freely. But they nowhere extend the efficacy of grace so far as to destroy or overcome that freedom, or indeed any farther than is necessary to recover and to establish it. So that the sacred writings represent man in his natural state, to be like the traveller in the gospel, after he had fallen among thieves, and was left half dead. What his weakness and bruises were to him, with respect to his journey, that our natural corruptions and infirmities are to us, with respect to our progress in our duty. He could not go on till his wounds were first healed; no more can we, in our spiritual calling, till our infirmities are first removed. And what the good Samaritan did for him, in removing his impediments, that the divine grace does for us, in conquering our depravity. He could not have pursued his journey without the good man's assistance, no more can we pursue ours to heaven without divine grace; and therefore it is said, that *God worketh in us to will and to do*. But as then the Samaritan, by healing the wounds of the traveller, did not destroy but establish his liberty; and instead of forcing him to proceed in his road, only put it in his power to stay where he was, or to go backwards or forwards, as he pleased: even so, in like manner, the Spirit of God does not force us, but only removes those difficulties we could not remove ourselves, and puts us in a condition of being happy or miserable, according to our own choice and behaviour. And as then he was truly said to prosecute his journey himself, notwithstanding the tender relief and comfort reached out to him by the compassionate Samaritan, without which he could not have gone on; even so we are said to *work out our own*

own salvation, notwithstanding the helps and gifts of the Holy Spirit, without which *we can do nothing*. And as, on the other hand, his not continuing his course, or deviating from the right way, would have been justly chargeable on himself, so will our punishments in the next world, for not performing our duty in this, be the just reward of our deeds. And lastly, as the poor helpless man could do nothing to merit the good offices of his supporter in his distress, so neither can we, to deserve God's grace; *it is not of works; lest any man should boast*; but it is the free and bounteous endowment of the Almighty, *otherwise grace is no more grace*.

This, as far as I am able to learn, is the true state of the scripture doctrine of divine grace. It is sufficient for all, and granted to all; it does neither compel us to do well, nor is wanting to us; and as we could not discharge our duty without it, therefore the discharge of it is not of ourselves, but *our sufficiency is of God*.

Now the practical truths which I would establish upon these premises, and which I wish myself able to imprint strongly on men's minds, are these:

1. That no man has reason to despair of mercy. The blessed Jesus died for all, and the benefits of his death will be applied to all who are willing to receive and embrace them.

2. That no Christian can justly charge his vices upon the weakness of his nature, or the strength of temptation: this is *charging God foolishly*; whereas we ought to charge ourselves. St. Paul's account, *what I would I did not, and what I would not, that I in fact did*, is a just description of unassisted nature; but, if we understand him to say, as I fear many do, *the good I would I could not, and the evil I would not, that only I could do*; this is not the case of any Christian, after *the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost*.

3. That the true way to judge whether we have this grace, is by our words and actions. *He that doth good is of God; he that doeth evil is of the devil*. Inward sensations may deceive us, and our recourse to them be of dangerous consequence. It may puff us up with spiritual pride, upon a fancied possession of what we have not; or it may give us great

trouble and disquiet, upon an imaginary want of what we really have. But the other is a most infallible rule. *A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit: wherefore by their fruit ye shall know them*.

4. That we ought to be ever thankful and dependent upon God for these assistances, and be always imploring the continuance of them; neglecting not the assemblies of the faithful, or any of Christ's institutions, but devoutly frequenting them, and thankfully embracing them, as the ordinances of God, and the means of grace. And,

5. and lastly, That the apostle's argument is a very just one, when he infers from this doctrine of grace, that we ought not therefore to neglect, but be the more diligent in our duty; that we ought to be the more vigilant and unwearied, since we know *our labour will not be in vain in the Lord*: and, in a word, that we ought to be so *stedfast and unmoveable*, and always so to abound ourselves in the work of our salvation, as if we received nothing from God; and at the same time, so to thank and adore the goodness of God, as if we did nothing ourselves.

SERMON CXLIX.

Christianity recommended, as promoting national Honour and Prosperity.

DEUT. iv. 6.

Keep therefore and do them; for this is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of all the nations, which shall hear all these statutes, and say, This great nation is a wise and understanding people.

MOSES, the great and wise lawgiver of the Jews, is here recapitulating to them the laws he had given them from God, confirming those laws with the strongest sanctions, and pressing the observance of them with the most powerful motives by which he could enforce it. In the third verse of this chapter he appeals to their senses, to convince them that their peace and prosperity depended upon it; and that they were not to expect the divine favour and blessing, but, on the contrary, the divine wrath and indignation, if they kept not the commandments of the Lord their God. *Your eyes, says he, have seen what the Lord did*
3 K because

because of Baal-peor, the idol of the Moabites, whom some of the Israelites had worshipped; for all the men that followed Baal-peor, the Lord thy God hath destroyed them from among you. But, on the other hand, ye that did cleave unto the Lord your God are alive every one of you this day. (Deut. iv. 4.)

And here in the 6th verse he proceeds, from their senses and experience, to appeal to their understandings; tells them that, as the one had shewn them the miserable consequences of forsaking their Maker, the other would convince them of the folly of it; and observes to them, that a strict adherence to the laws which he had given them, would not only draw down upon them the blessings of Providence, but would likewise raise them high in the estimation of all the neighbouring nations for their knowledge and wisdom. *Keep therefore and do them; for this is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of all the nations, which shall hear all these statutes, and say, This great nation is a wise and understanding people.* In speaking to which words I shall pursue this method:

I. I shall endeavour to shew that the fear of God, and the observance of his laws, are the most effectual means to promote the true interests and welfare of any body or society of men, considered as such.

II. That Christianity does establish these advantages better than any other religion; because it lays the foundation deeper in the minds of men; and because it binds them upon their hearts in a stronger manner by the authority of its precepts, and the weight of its sanctions. And consequently,

III. That it must therefore be the wisdom and understanding of any people, considered as such, to study and practise the duties of the Christian life; because it is the most effectual means to promote and establish present peace and prosperity; and because it is the surest and most effectual method to transmit these blessings, when once established, to their latest posterity.

I. First I am to shew that the fear of God, and the observance of his laws, are the most effectual means to promote the true interests and welfare of any people, considered as such; and this may appear,

if we take a short view of their interests, either as governors or as subjects.

As governors; on what does their happiness so much depend as on the ready submission and cheerful obedience of those whom they govern; on their willing compliance with all their just commands; their paying all due honour and respect to their persons; and their ready furnishing all those supplies which are necessary to support their dignity and honour? On what does their happiness so much depend, as on having all seeds of discord, sedition, and rebellion, effectually rooted out of the minds of the people; on having the turbulent spirits of the restless and factious kept quiet; the mischievous desires or designs of the envious stifled, or rendered abortive; the destructive schemes of the ambitious prevented or overturned; the secret machinations of the licentious discovered; and the open attempts of the desperate suppressed and punished? In proportion as these things are more or less effectually secured, the governor approaches more or less to the utmost felicity he can enjoy as such; and in proportion as these things are left open or neglected, his safety becomes precarious, his authority is diminished, and his uneasiness and disquiet certain. And what can so effectually promote the one and prevent the other, as the fear of God, and the keeping of his commandments? Human laws can extend but a very little way. Men may be very bad subjects and very turbulent members of society, and yet keep without the cognizance of human courts of justice: and experience has ever shewn it to be true, and we need not go far back for some unhappy instances of it, that when men abate of their reverence and esteem for the laws of their Maker, they at the same time grow regardless and contemptuous of those whom his providence has set over them. They treat them with great licentiousness, if not with contempt; and thereby weaken the sinews of government and destroy the welfare of the society. And it is therefore the wisdom of governors to pursue the advice of the text, because it tends most effectually to secure their happiness as such; it is their understanding to take care that the laws of God be duly kept and observed, because this is the best means to promote that submission, reverence, and obedience,

obedience, among their people, upon which their peace and prosperity do absolutely depend.

If we take a view of the true interests of the members of society as subjects, we may consider those interests, both with regard to those that govern the people, and with regard to one another.

With regard to those who govern, what blessings can their subjects reasonably expect or desire from them, but those of an equal and impartial administration of justice to all without distinction; protection and support in all their natural, civil, and religious rights; courage and intrepidity in their defence from foreign enemies; and a due restraint of all acts of oppression and violence, in any of their fellow-subjects? And what can fill the breasts of princes with such generous, humane, and god-like sentiments, from whence alone can such a conduct uniformly flow, but a just sense that they are themselves the subjects of a superior Being; and that *He, who is higher than the highest, regardeth their actions, and will bring them into judgment?* What can secure them from the oppressions and cruelty of avarice, the insolence of pride, and the wantonness of uncontrouled power, but a just awe and veneration of that God *by whom they reign?* They are usually out of the reach of human laws and restraints: or if not altogether above them, have it much in their power to alter or evade them: and nothing can conduce so much to render them the true guardians and fathers of their people, as their copying the forbearance, beneficence, and love of their great Creator. This would inspire them with a paternal affection for those whose welfare much depends on their countenance and favour; would diffuse an universal joy and gladness through the hearts of all under their protection, who deserve the blessings of it; and ought in justice to create a great dependence and confidence in them, and their administrations. History does nowhere furnish us with a greater instance of a sincere fear of God in a governor, and at the same time of the most noble, generous, and disinterested patriotism, as the consequence of it, than in the great lawgiver, who daily exemplified the truth of his advice in the text. We every where find him conducting, cherishing, and defending, the most

perverse, rebellious, and obstinate people, with the tenderness of a parent. He bears their insults with meekness; takes their cares upon himself; gives himself wholly up to the study and pursuit of their welfare; and when they had highly offended and incensed the God of heaven, he freely offers himself as a sacrifice to divine justice, to screen them from it.

And, with regard to one another, on what does the general happiness and prosperity of a people so much depend, as on a mutual respect, confidence, and affection? Without these, a reciprocal exchange of good offices will be prevented or suspended; trade and commerce can never flourish; nor can the necessary intercourses of social life be maintained with any comfort or delight. And what can effectually create and improve this inward union of mind and heart, but an union in the worship and obedience of the same Supreme Being, whom all acknowledge to be their Maker and Protector; and a firm persuasion in every one, that their neighbour adores the Searcher of Hearts, and, out of reverence to his laws, will neither deceive nor defraud them? Where this persuasion prevails, the confidence is mutual, credit flourishes, friendships are contracted, and every man finds it his interest to assist, entertain, and comfort his fellow-citizens in distress, since he has reason to hope for an equal return of beneficence, should the same calamities overtake him. But principles of this kind are not to be impressed with force on the minds of the generality of men, by any authority less than that of the universal Lord of all things, and a sense of our obligations to observe his commandments. The laws of men can reach no farther than the outward act; it is religion only can reform the mind; and if men are to be taught just notions of right and wrong, of equity, truth, compassion, beneficence, and mutual affection, which are so essential to the welfare of all united bodies of men, it is from that source only that they can be with any certainty derived. And it is to the influences of religion on the minds of men, that we are to ascribe every act of disinterested justice, compassion, or mercy, which human laws could not oblige them to; and without which the main body of any society would reap few of the true comforts of social life.

So much is it the wisdom of the governed, as such, to study with diligence the statutes of the Lord, and *to keep and do them*. And if the fear of God in general does so plainly contribute to promote the true interests and welfare of any society, considered as such, it will be as evident,

II. That Christianity does establish these advantages better than any other religion, if it be considered, that it lays the foundation deeper in the minds of men, and binds those duties on them in a stronger manner, by the weight of its authority, the plainness of its rules, and the force of its sanctions.

If religion in general can furnish men with those virtues and dispositions, without which no society can tolerably subsist, it is only because it gives them true notions of the goodness, justice, and other perfections of God, and of those excellent moral duties, by which they ought to regulate their conduct: otherwise, false religions may themselves introduce cruelty, tyranny, incontinence, and the whole train of vices which are the great disturbers of the peace and welfare of society. And those true conceptions of Almighty God, and of our respective duties to one another, in all the different relations of life, can no where be learned with that clearness and ease, and are no where built on such divine principles, or carried to that degree of perfection, as in the sacred books of the New Testament. Every governor must here see that all acts of cruelty, tyranny, and oppression, must be displeasing and offensive to the God of peace and love. Every subject is here taught that all defamation, sedition, or rebellion, against the lawful governors which God has set over them, is an offence against him whose ordinance they are, and cannot escape unpunished. Every man is here instructed to practise every virtue, and cultivate every disposition of mind and heart, by which the happiness of his neighbour can be promoted; and is required not only *to do to others as he would be done by*, but *to love his neighbour as himself*. And all this is bound on the minds and consciences of the people in the gospel of Christ, with all the weight it can receive from the authority of God himself, and under the terrible penalty of eternal damnation. What then can so highly advance, and

so strongly defend the welfare of society in all its branches, the honour and dignity of the prince, and the peace and prosperity of the people, as an institution which is of a divine original, and which is in itself *first pure and then peaceable*; which breathes nothing but inward purity and sincerity of heart, and unites men together in respect, affection, and love, by the strongest ties by which human nature can be bound; not only as fellow-creatures and the workmanship and worshippers of the same God, but as partakers of the same holy and divine ordinances, and as fellow-candidates for future and eternal glory? If virtue and vice be respectively productive of the greatest good and the greatest evil to society, which no considerate man will deny, the good man then must be the best of citizens, and the good Christian the best of men: He is virtuous upon principles which will never fail him, but make him as uniform in all circumstances as human infirmities and frailties will permit, and which require him to be helpful and compassionate to all men, to honour and obey magistrates, and to be in the use of power, a protection to the innocent, and a defence of the oppressed.

To which I must add, that the practice of our holy religion is not only thus naturally productive of the happiness of social life, but is likewise the best title we can have to the blessings of God, the great governor of the universe, without which all our labours after safety and prosperity will be lost, *and the watchman awaketh but in vain*. His favour and protection have ever followed virtuous states and governments; and his indignation and vengeance have ever pursued the impious. He is pleased to reward and punish the virtue and the wickedness of societies and empires, as such, in the present world, since there will be no room for it in another. This is evident not only from the history of his own people, in all the changes and revolutions which their government underwent, but from the histories of all other nations, of which we have sufficient data to reason upon; and which, like the Roman increase and flourish, as long as temperance, frugality, chastity, and other virtues are national, and spread among them; but, like that great empire too, immediately decline and decay, as soon as luxury and impiety get public countenance

nance and indulgence, and pave the way for their destruction. And consequently therefore, it must, as was observed,

III. Be the wisdom, and the understanding of any people, as such, to study and practise the duties of the Christian life; because it is the most effectual means to promote and establish present peace and prosperity; and to transmit those blessings, when once established, to their latest posterity.

This appears both from the natural tendency of the thing to these great ends, and from the promises of the Almighty, without whose favour we are nothing, that *those that honour him he will honour, and those that despise him shall be lightly esteemed*. So that the maxim of the Wise Man, *that righteousness exalteth a nation, and that sin is not only the reproach, but will be the ruin of any people*, is as evident from history as from reason; and indeed the greatest enemies of religion allow as much; and when they can no longer deny the force of the argument drawn from hence in its favour, they idly endeavour to evade it, by suggesting, that religion itself was the invention of cunning men for this very purpose: a suggestion highly honourable to the religion they would deny, as well as very ridiculous and absurd in itself! For who can think it probable, that all the statesmen of the world, whose business is usually to get honour to themselves, should all agree to invent the worship of superior beings in order to obtain that end? Or who can think it possible, that so many, and in so different ages and countries, should all, without any intercourse or contrivance among themselves, be so very lucky as to hit upon the very same expedient, and that the very wisest that could possibly be found out for their purpose? Is it to be imagined that none of them should find it more agreeable to their pride and ambition, to set up a worship to themselves rather than to a God, or Gods, above them? Is it to be conceived that not one man in so many thousands should fail of reasoning in the wisest and best manner, that it was possible for him to do, on a subject which is far from being within the compass of every capacity? In point of reason they might as well pretend that mankind in general invented the rain or the sunshine, because they all universally agree in the usefulness of

them. So poor is the evasion, and so strong the confession of enemies themselves in favour of this truth, that to *bear all the statutes of the Lord, and to keep and to do them*, are the surest proofs which any nation can give, that they are a *wise and understanding people*. And I cannot conclude without drawing the two following inferences, as corollaries, from what has been said:

First, It from hence appears, that they among us, who are enemies to the Christian religion, are in effect the greatest enemies to their country. This is so very plain, that they must be very short-sighted themselves, if they are not conscious of it; and their prejudices and passions must have strangely blinded them if they do not see it. For whoever will impartially and seriously consider the nature of men and things, cannot but acknowledge, that he who labours to set men's minds free from the greater and most important restraints, does thereby teach them a very ready way to cast off the weaker and less affecting; that he, who teaches the people to sport and divert themselves with divine laws, takes the most sure and effectual method to bring all human ones into contempt; and that no man can lessen their reverence for the authority of God, without diminishing their awe and respect for the authority of man. True patriotism, then, and impiety and infidelity are utterly inconsistent; and the man who has the interest of his country sincerely at heart will, on that account, labour to promote true virtue and piety among his fellow-citizens: because whoever unsettles the minds of the people in these sacred and important things, loosens the strongest ties by which the union of society can be preserved; he in a great measure leaves every man at liberty to *do what is right in his own eyes*; the consequence of which, unless timely stopped, must be utter confusion and ruin to the state.

Lastly, and to conclude:—From what has been said it may likewise appear, that it is a duty which every man, and the magistrate especially, owes the state, to promote, as far as in him lies, the practice of virtue and piety, and to stop the progress of vice and profaneness. Some men indeed would fain distinguish between the magistrate and the man in this instance; and tell us, that it is his

duty as a magistrate only to take cognizance of such vices as immediately affect the public, and that religion as such ought to be no part of his concern; though they allow it to be his duty as a man to worship God, and to promote his honour and service. But they might with as much reason make two persons of the soul and the body of the same man; and tell us, that he is not at all engaged to those duties, as a soul, to which, as a body, he is indispensably obliged. Besides the connexion between the practice of virtue and piety and the welfare of a community is, as has been shewn, as inseparable as the duties of different relations are from the person who bears them. He that discourages or does not encourage the one, must do a proportionate damage and mischief to the other: and the example of the magistrate is of such consequence to the public, that if it does not do good to the commonwealth it must do it harm; and he cannot discharge his obligations to God or man without labouring to suppress all vice and impiety, as destructive of the body in which he presides.

S E R M O N C L.

Public Worship recommended.

PSALM CXVI. 18, 19.

I will pay my vows unto the Lord, now in the presence of all his people; in the midst of the Lord's house, in the midst of thee, O Jerusalem.

THE royal prophet was not more remarkable for his rise from the sheepfold to the throne, than for his zeal and affection for that God who raised him. And the other authors of those hymns which are collected under his name, are not less considerable for the most sincere love for his honour and glory. And for this reason the book of Psalms has ever been commended and admired by good men, as a most invaluable treasure of piety and devotion. We see here the natural and unaffected conduct of a mind warmed and actuated by divine love; the gentle whispers and affectionate breathings of a soul raised by the contemplation of divine things; and the joy and exultation of an overflowing gratitude bursting out itself, and calling upon all

nature to imitate it, in the loudest acclamations of joy and thanksgiving. Of the last kind is this whole psalm, of which the text is a part; whatever was the particular occasion, or whoever the author of it, we see him so affected with the signal blessings which had lately been vouchsafed him, that nothing less will content him than professing his gratitude to God who gave them in the most open, public, and exemplary manner. *I will pay my vows unto the Lord, now in the presence of all his people; in the courts of the Lord's house, even in the midst of thee, O Jerusalem.* And in applying these words from the Jewish to the Christian church, I propose to represent the great benefits of attending the public offices of our religion, in the following instances:

I. In that it helps to keep up some sense of God and religion in the minds even of those who are very regardless of them. There is something so agreeable to the common sentiments of mankind in publicly praising and adoring our great Creator, that men must have taken great pains to corrupt their own minds, and must have gone great lengths in vicious courses, before they can bring themselves to a neglect or contempt of so wise an institution. And even then it must have some effect and influence upon them, to see others join with one heart and one mouth in their applications to God, on whose goodness they depend, and in whom and by whom all things consist. It must strike them with some shame and remorse at least, by giving them such strong mementos of their own duty; and as long as one virtuous sentiment remains uneffaced in the mind, it will excite and strengthen it. For the decency and solemnity of Christian worship, when duly performed and diligently attended to, is such as must diffuse great seriousness through all devout minds, and must strike all present, who are not lost to every thing that is sacred and good, with some awe and reverence. It is indeed a lovely and an affecting sight to behold men of all ranks unite in humbling themselves before their Lord and Saviour. And that man must retain but a very weak sense of God and his duty who does not find himself powerfully excited to fall prostrate and adore, when he sees the rich and the poor, the highest and the lowest, imploring those common blessings at the throne

throne of grace, without which neither private persons nor societies could subsist. And this open public discharge of so necessary a duty has likewise some good and happy influences even on those who are too much abandoned to join it. It gives some check and discountenance at least to their impiety and profaneness, as it is a public disavowal and discountenance of them; and it often obliges wicked men to lurk in secret when they blaspheme, and to be under some restraints when they revile God and religion, out of deference to the common sense and practice of mankind. And indeed, were it not for the frequent returns and devout attendance on these solemn assemblies, it is much to be feared that they who are now bad would soon be worse; that the spreading profaneness and infidelity of the age, already very great, would become much greater; and that, in the course of but a few years, there would scarce remain any footsteps of our holy religion among us. And for this reason, among many others, as being so public and general a good, I conceive it was that the Almighty was pleased to insist so much on this particular in the ordinances he gave the Jews; and to require them in the most solemn manner, and under the severest penalties, to *observe his sabbaths, and reverence his sanctuary.*

II. A second benefit of our public worship is, that it gives us an opportunity of openly professing our faith and love for our blessed Redeemer in the wisest and best manner. In an age when men are grown wanton with the blessings of heaven, so wanton as to spurn at that God who gives them; when luxury and debauchery are carried to the greatest excesses; and men, grown giddy with their iniquities, are not ashamed to ask, *How should God perceive it? Is there knowledge in the Most High?* When they glory in *crucifying the Son of God afresh, and in putting him to an open shame*, it must be matter of great satisfaction to the faithful Christian to have frequent opportunities of proclaiming his innocence in the sight of God and man. Since, *as with the heart man believeth unto righteousness, so with the mouth confession is made unto salvation*; since *he that denieth the Son of God before men will infallibly be denied by him before his Father which is in heaven*; it must

give inward delight and pleasure to those that sincerely love him, to be able to declare in the most public manner that they are not either afraid or ashamed to confess him; and they must think it their duty to acquit themselves of partaking of these sins of others by an open disavowal of them. And if this be at all proper or necessary for them, when can they do it with so much justice to themselves, or so much advantage to their Christian brethren, as at those times and in those places which are immediately dedicated to God's honour and service? When can they so properly declare their belief in the word of God, as after it has been solemnly read to them? And when can that holy word be so usefully read and explained, as when they assemble *in the courts of the Lord* to pay their vows unto him? Besides, facts are the best and the most authentic interpreters of words; and when public worship is joined to public confession, and men adore that God and Saviour in whom they profess to believe, they give one of the strongest and best proofs of their sincerity in that profession; they pay their vows of adoring and confessing their Redeemer in the wisest and best manner; and they ought to rejoice in those opportunities of doing public honour to him, and of edifying and comforting one another. And therefore I consider it as a

III^d great benefit of the public assemblies of the Christian church, that it gives them an opportunity of powerfully exciting others to follow so good and laudable an example. It is much to the just praise and credit of Christianity that it considers the whole human race as one great family, and Christians only as distinguished from the rest by the peculiar blessings of Heaven, and as under greater ties and more indispensable obligations to consult and promote on all occasions the mutual benefit of each other, and of all mankind. It is the farthest from any narrow and selfish views of any institution that ever was received in the world; and is therefore the more worthy of its divine Author, and may be the more evidently proved to come from him. Its first principle is an universal love for all sorts and conditions of men, as founded in and derived from a love of their common Parent; and, in consequence of this, the strictest tenderness and affection for

one another, as incorporated in the same mystical body, and united to the same head, the Lord Christ Jesus. Hence it is that Christians are represented in scripture as *being*, though many in number, yet *all one body in Christ, and every one members one of another* (Rom. xii. 4.); as *being all members of the body of Christ*, (1 Cor. xii. 17.) *who is the head over all things in the church* (Eph. i. 23.); and more particularly even as members of Christ's natural body, *of his flesh and of his bones*. (Eph. v. 30.) And the inference from hence is very plain and conclusive, that we ought therefore to have the same concern and the same tenderness for each other; or, in the words of holy writ, that we should *have the same care one for another*; and whether *one suffer, all the rest should suffer with it; or if one of them be honoured, all the rest should rejoice with it*. (1 Cor. xii. 25, 26.) And hence that noble and magnanimous precept of St. Paul to his Philippians, *Look not every man on his own things, but everyman also on the things of others*. (Philip. ii. 3.) That is, do not imagine that you can discharge your duty by consulting your private interest and advantage only; but remember that, as Christians, you are become members of a great community, and are indispensably obliged by the laws of that communion to study and promote, as far as in you lies, the happiness of all that partake of it as well as your own. And in order to press this upon them in the strongest and most affecting manner, the apostle commands them in the following words to recollect the most astonishing example of love to others that ever did or could be given to the world; and to imitate that example in the same kind of love, though not in the degree of it: *Let the same mind be in you*, that is, let the same kind of affection for each other rule in your hearts, *which was also in Christ Jesus*; who, though in the form of God, *took upon him the form of a servant*, in love to the souls of men, and for their sakes became obedient to death, even the death of the cross. And if then we are obliged as Christians to have a regard for each other's welfare, this concern ought surely to be first employed in what relates to the salvation of their souls. And if we are obliged to promote each other's spiritual happiness, one most proper means of doing that

must be to rouse and stir them up to discharge their duty to God by frequent and solemn addresses to him. And therefore I esteem it one benefit of our public worship, as public, that good Christians have frequent opportunities given them, thereby powerfully to awaken and excite others to their duty by their own examples. For there is something very powerful and very awakening in the behaviour of an humble devout Christian when he approaches the throne of grace. There are great beauties in his devotion and deportment which discerning eyes cannot well miss observing, and which, when observed, cannot but affect them; not in noisy clamours and extatic raptures, which are generally offensive to good men, but in the quiet and still voice with which he breathes out his prayers, and in the struggle and contention which is in his own breast, between the fear of offending others by too great an appearance of devotion, and the fear of offending his God by too little a sense of it. Such is the behaviour of good men in the discharge of this great and important duty; and it is their benefit to excite, it is the benefit of others to be thus excited to seek the graces of a *meek and humble spirit, which in the sight of God are of great price*. This is literally *letting their light so shine before men, as that they may see their good works*, and may be led by good and affecting motives to *glorify their Father which is in heaven*.

IV. A fourth benefit of *paying our vows to the Lord in the sight of all his people* is this, that we are thereby in some measure entitled to the success of their prayers at the same time that we offer up our own. Prayer in general has ever been esteemed by good men, not only as a great and important duty, but as in itself a great blessing and advantage to mankind; as a duty suited to the wants and misery of the present life, and most productive of peace and composure in it; as the surest refuge for comfort in an afflicted state, and the surest basis and ballast of the soul in a successful one. And accordingly it is represented to us by the sacred writers as very agreeable and acceptable to God, and very powerful and effectual with him. His promises are annexed to the due discharge of it; and instances are given us of good men in all ages who have experienced the performance

formance of those promises. And the inferences I would draw from thence are, that whatever blessings are promised to it, whatever advantages may flow from it when privately discharged, the same and greater effects may it be supposed to have when jointly made *in the courts of the Lord's house*; and that whatever reasons we have as men and Christians to offer up our prayers to God in secret, the same and greater must we have for assembling together for this purpose, because incorporated in the same civil society, and because members of the church of Christ. The same, I say, and more reasons appear for the one than are or can be offered in defence of the other. For whatever can shew the prayer of one man to be acceptable to God must at least conclude as strongly for the joint prayers of many; whatever arguments can shew the success and benefit of private devotions, must equally at least demonstrate the advantages of public devotion in the *assemblies of the saints*. And besides these, there are many other arguments in favour of this duty, which arise from the concern we ought always to have for the welfare and prosperity of the public, and from our union and communion in the ordinances of Christ. And if then *the eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and his ears will be open to each one's private prayers*, how much more regard may we suppose him to shew to their united intercessions in places set apart for his honour and service? If *he is nigh to all them that call upon him in secret, and will hear their cry and will help them*, how much more powerful must their joint supplications be when offered with one heart and one mind? Whatever causes can be supposed to render the prayers of one effectual, must surely be supposed to have still greater effects in favour of the united voices of many; and if any weight may by this means be added to the efficacy of our prayers, all this every private Christian has added to his own in the public assemblies of the church; and this ought to be one just and pressing motive to attend those assemblies, and to *watch thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints*.

The last benefit I shall mention of paying our vows to the Lord publicly in the midst of our Jerusalem is, that this is the strictest bond of union with one an-

other. Religion is the great cement of civil society, without which no body of men could long unite, or be kept united together. In order to this they must have some common principles to govern their actions, and these principles must reach to and influence the heart. And these are only to be derived from a sense of religious duties; which sense can no other way be so strongly impressed on the mind as by the frequency and solemnity of public worship. By this every man professes his belief in that God whom he worships, and appeals to him for his sincerity, of which his neighbour cannot judge; and by this appeal every man is more or less endeared to every other man that makes it. This creates confidence; and firmly roots in the heart benevolence and other Christian virtues; and these produce in common life the invaluable fruits of mutual love, reciprocal joy and grief, and general peace.

Such are some of the mighty benefits that flow from our attendance on the public worship of our God, considered as public. The comforts of civil life are greatly, if not solely, built upon it; our own prayers are rendered the more efficacious for it; we further the salvation of others; and we justify our own veracity and sincerity by it; and we even lay some checks and restraints upon the profane who impiously neglect or refuse to frequent it.

To which I might add many more of a spiritual nature, from the excellent manner in which we perform it; from our spiritual communion with Christ, which is supported by it; and from those excellent methods of instruction which usually attend it. But I have scarce time to draw the inferences which I intend from what has been said, and which are,

1. The duty of being frequent in this attendance. And,

2. The necessity of being early in it.

First, The duty of being frequent in our attendance to pay our vows to the Lord jointly in the midst of our Jerusalem. If the apostle to the Hebrews had not commanded them *not to forsake the assembling themselves together*, the genius of the Christian religion and the nature of the thing would have sufficiently shewn the necessity and importance of it. The whole bent of the Christian religion

is

is to bring us to an union with God, which union cannot be obtained or preserved without frequent communications with him; and whatever reasons or precepts shew it to be the indispensable duty of Christians in a private capacity, the same reasons and precepts will bind it with more force on all bodies and communities of Christians considered as such. And therefore nothing can be more weak than to neglect the public assemblies under pretence that the contrary is not necessary, or not beneficial; or, in other words, under pretence that we can employ ourselves as beneficially at home, and as acceptably to God, in our own closets. Such objections can proceed only either from great weakness of judgment, or great ignorance of the nature of Christianity, or great corruption of mind. Some benefits have already been mentioned which cannot be obtained by private prayers, and more of a higher nature might easily be added; and nothing, I think, is more certain than that whatever promotes the salvation of great bodies of men must, for that reason, be more agreeable to God than what concerns only the safety of individuals.

Lastly, and to conclude, The other inference is, the necessity of an early attendance on the public offices of religion, as established among us, lest we should lose the benefits of the most noble and important of them. Both the offices we use, I mean prayers and sermons, are without doubt of great use to a Christian people, and the wisdom and piety of the church is very evident in the appointment and union of them: but I have all along confined myself to the prayers only, and would therefore observe here, that to prefer the sermon to them when we cannot attend both, or totally to neglect them when there is no sermon, favours more of vanity than of a truly Christian spirit; and more of curiosity than of judgment. For at best, when sermons are what they ought to be, zealous defences, clear and judicious explanations, or strong and earnest enforcements of Christian doctrine and practice; and when they are received in the manner they ought to be, not as matters of curiosity or custom, much less as exercises of the critical talents of the hearer, or the supposed or real defects of the preacher, but with a sincere desire and resolution

to know, remember, and do our duty; even then, if the offices must be compared, that of offering up the joint prayers of the congregation is, in point of dignity, more honourable, with regard to use more beneficial, and in point of duty more necessary. One is the address of all to the supreme Lord of the universe; the other is the address of one to men like himself. By preaching the understanding may be informed, the memory quickened, and the affections raised; but by prayer the soul is comforted and the heart is made better: the former is an exhortation or explanation of duty, the latter is the actual discharge of that duty in one of its most noble and important branches. And I wish therefore that, without derogating from the usefulness of the one, more regard might be had to the necessity of the other; and that when any propose to appear in the assemblies of the faithful, they would remember, that the most necessary and most beneficial part of their duty there is, with them to offer up their prayers and praises to God, and *to pay their vows unto the Most High*.

SERMON CLI.

By JEREMIAH SEED, M. A.
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Religious Pleasures productive of the
greatest Happiness.

PROV. iii. 17.

Her ways are ways of pleasantness.

THE turbulent passions, such as anger and revenge, are disagreeable to our nature, because they are open and declared enemies to our repose: they alarm the soul at their first insurrection, and afterwards command it with an overbearing tyranny. But pleasure steals upon us by insensible degrees, smooths its passage to the heart by a gentle and insinuating address, and softens and disarms the soul of all its strength. It is more therefore to be guarded against, as being more dangerous, and what we have a greater inclination to. To arm us then against the deceitfulness

deceitfulness of unlawful sensual delights, I have chosen the words of Solomon, which set before us the genuine and sincere pleasure which religion affords: *Her ways are ways of pleasantness*. In discoursing on which words I shall endeavour to shew,

I. First, That the pleasures of religion and virtue are superior to the pleasures of the animal life; and,

II. Secondly, How necessarily those must be disappointed, who place their happiness in any thing exclusive of religion and virtue.

First then I am to shew, that the pleasures of religion and virtue are superior to the pleasures of the animal life.

And here we expect to be told by the men of pleasure, that spiritual satisfactions are nothing but the product of an over-heated fancy, and mere enthusiasm. But we except against them as very incompetent judges. A good man, by tasting the pleasures of sense, as far as they are consistent with reason, is very well qualified to form a true estimate of them. But the sensual man, by being an utter stranger to religion, is no more able to make a judgment of the satisfaction it yields, than a man of no taste is to pass a decisive verdict upon the elegancies of poetry, or an idiot upon a point of philosophy.

Dismissing him therefore as an improper judge, we appeal to the virtuous for the superiority of rational delights; whether others are not for the most part either idle diversions to lull our unquiet thoughts to sleep, to sooth the mind into a forgetfulness of itself, and to make life pass away unperceived; or rather, whether they are not tumultuous joys, that put us in a ferment, and give the soul too sudden and violent emotions. Whereas virtuous pleasures produce a serene and lasting composure of mind; they satisfy, but never satiate. They flow not, like a torrent, with a short-lived noise and impetuosity; but like a peaceful river in its own channel, strong without violence, and gentle without dullness.

But what am I going to prove—that he who strives to resemble God in holiness and purity, must have superior gratifications to him who makes himself like the beasts that perish? A man that is sunk into brutality may indeed deny that those delights must be the highest which are seated in the highest and noblest part

of us, the soul: but all the world besides will own, that the joys which spring from a distempered appetite, and are accompanied with a feverishness of desire, are infinitely inferior to those of a well-regulated mind, and a conscience void of offence towards God and towards man.

We see in several instances, that men prefer their reputation before the gratification of a brutal appetite, when put in competition with each other; and though free from conscience, they are yet slaves to fame. Now the pleasure of a good name is seated in the mind; it comes not from sensation but reflection. They own then, that an intellectual good is preferable to the gross indulgencies of the animal life. But if reputation, which is but the shadow of virtue, claims the ascendant and superiority over sensual enjoyments; certainly virtue, which is the substance itself, ought to take place of them in the true and impartial estimate of things.

I would gladly persuade the voluptuary to try an experiment, and then tell me, when he has cherished the worthy, and relieved the distressed by some well-placed act of charity, whether the consciousness of having made an human heart to sing for joy, and the blessing of him that was ready to perish come upon him, did not impart a more liberal, manly, and unallayed complacency, than all the cheating blandishments and allurements of sense. The latter are the pleasures of the brute; whereas the former are the pleasures of the man, shall I say? rather of good angels, nay even of God, who, wanting nothing himself, supplies the wants of every other being. And what can more transport, what can more ennoble the soul, than to be so temperate, as to have as few wants as possible in ourselves; and yet so charitable as to do as much good as possible to others? A remarkable instance of this disinterested virtue, and the superior satisfaction that attends great and worthy actions, we have in the generous Scipio, who, in the bloom of youth, returned his fair captive, a master-piece of beauty, to her future husband and parents, whom conquest gave him an absolute right to, in the opinion of the heathen world. When he refused a considerable sum of gold, which was offered by the parents; and when at last consenting to accept of it, at their repeated instances, he delivered it

it as a part of her dowry to her spouse; I desire to know, whether the commendations which his own heart gave him, seconded with the praises of an husband and parents, delivered from their jealous apprehensions, did not inspire him with a greater exultation of delight than the possession of an injured woman could have afforded. Their praises were the sincere tribute of grateful hearts, and flowed from the fullness of their souls; and nothing could be more acceptable to Scipio's ingenuous mind, except the consciousness of the beauty of his own action; whereas the thoughts of wounding the honour of a noble family, and the peace of aged parents, must have dashed his enjoyments, and rendered them distasteful. This delicate sentiment of Scipio was attended with much truer and more solid satisfaction than any sensual gratification could have been; it was the pleasure of reason, which will bear repeating in the mind, and improves upon reflection.

On the contrary, where the gross affections take place, they leave little room for virtue; they tarnish the lustre of the best actions, and make a man uneasy and dissatisfied with himself. For he that is good by halves, labours under a perpetual discord of life; he is agitated alternately by sentiments of unlawful pleasure and piety, and passeth his life in a perpetual round of following and condemning the same things. On the one hand, the remainders of virtue and conscience embitter the sweets of vice; and, on the other hand, the practice of vice palls the relish of virtue and spiritual delights. He is neither brute enough to indulge his appetites without remorse, nor man enough to govern them. Hence he is at perpetual variance with himself, having just religion enough to make him uneasy, but not enough to make him happy.

A man that is divided between piety and sin, is like one that lives on the confines of two mighty contending states; his breast is a constant seat of war; and he is sometimes under the dominion of virtue, and sometimes under the tyranny of vice: whereas a person of advanced piety, like one that lives in the inmost part of the country, enjoys a secure and unmolested situation of soul.

Thus does uneasiness haunt the man, that, like a person struck with the dead palsy, is part dead and part alive; and

thus it will disquiet him, till his conscience becomes seared as it were with a hot iron, and he thinks there is no difference between good and evil; and to be persuaded of this, is as difficult as to believe there is no God.

But to take a right estimate of a man of pleasure, we should view him in the last stage of life. Good God! how contemptible does he appear to the world, and I dare say, even to himself, when he has no more that sprightliness and outward form which raised the admiration of the unthinking; nor that virtue and knowledge which is necessary to gain the esteem of the wise. When young (however inconsiderate and inconsiderable in himself) he might be fancied for a pert stupidity and a sprightly impertinence; some bright sentence in favour of infidelity, or piece of ridicule in contempt of religion, might meet with the applause of his ingenious acquaintance, who would be apt enough to stare upon him with a foolish face of praise. But the gaiety of youth being gone off, he must wear out the remainder of his days undistinguished and neglected; not daring to be alone; abhorring his own company; listless and uneasy at the present, he has no pleasure in reflecting upon what is past, nor in the prospect of any thing to come.

If he has an ample fortune, riches, it is true, may command an insipid complaisance; a formal homage and ceremonious professions of respect; and teach a servile world to speak a language foreign to their hearts. But where true merit is wanting, riches can never procure an affectionate esteem, an undissembled love, the tribute which virtue alone can either expect or deserve.

Hence it is that men of this stamp are continually complaining that the times are much altered for the worse; because the sprightliness of their youth represented every thing in the most engaging light, and when people are pleased with themselves, they are apt to be so with all around them; the face of nature brightens up, and the sun shines with a more agreeable lustre. But when old age has cut them off from the enjoyments they so much delighted in, and habitual vice has given them a disrelish of the only true pleasure, *whose leaf withers not*, and whose verdure remains in the winter of our days; no wonder, that a soul thus dis-

tempered,

tempered, should view every object on its dark side: the change is not in the times, but in themselves, who have been forsaken by those gratifications, which they could not be prevailed with to forsake. How much otherwise is it with the virtuous, who have laid up an inexhaustible fund of pleasures against old age! the current of whose virtue still increasing as it runs along, becomes more strong and vigorous the nearer it approaches to the ocean of eternity. But this brings me to shew,

Secondly, How necessarily those must be disappointed, who place their happiness in any thing exclusive of religion and virtue.

When we first make our entrance into the world, we are too apt to form sanguine notions and gaudy prospects of bliss; a thousand luxuriant scenes present themselves to our view. But by that time we reach the noon of life, experience of the world, frequent crosses and disappointments, call home our straggling thoughts, lower our notions of happiness, and reduce them to a just sense of things; to what is really attainable in this state; which is at best (for any length of time) not true pleasure, but rather a freedom from pain.

And if a man, at the close of life, were to make an impartial estimate, I doubt he would think his sufferings more than equivalent to his enjoyments: he would be unwilling, were the choice given him, to tread the same round over, and to measure life back again.

Few will deny this as to the poor, whose daily labour serves for little else but to get their daily bread, and their daily bread just refreshes and strengthens them to undergo their daily labour.

But the rich, you will say, have much fairer pretensions to happiness. Here then we may expect to find it, if any where: and yet they differ from others more in shew than reality; and perhaps their passions, being more importunate and clamorous in their demands, in proportion to the superiority of their fortune, may make them only more pompously wretched than the vulgar. Greatness, by making pleasure familiar to them, flattens their relish for it; but gives a keener edge to every pain, which they must feel as well as others; it dulls their enjoyments, but points and quickens the

sense of anguish and affronts. Indeed they may with application pursue this or that new pleasure, they may be fond for a while of a new acquisition; but when the gloss of novelty is once worn off, the transition is very natural from fondness to indifference; and that becomes tasteless and insipid to them, which they before so affectionately coveted. The eagerness of desire being over, we find that our reason was but the dupe of our imagination, which had painted things bigger than the life. Hence there is a restless agitation in our minds, still craving something new, still unsatisfied with it when possessed. Hence we are continually shifting the scene, expecting that happiness from a variety of enjoyments which we cannot find in any one of them. *All the rivers run into the sea, says the Wise Man, yet is the sea not full:* just so, though all earthly pleasures should centre in one soul, yet would not that soul be filled and satisfied; because as the soul is a spiritual being, nothing but spiritual pleasures can, in propriety of speech, be suitable to its nature, and proportioned to its grandeur. Hence that great king, after he had travelled through, and curiously surveyed every region of pleasure, returned at last to virtue, the native country of the soul, in which only she could dwell with satisfaction.

Here then the mistake lies; people in their enquiries after happiness place it on improper objects; they are looking for it abroad, and have recourse to a thousand diversions and amusements, whilst it is only to be found at home, in the right use of reason; in passions well regulated and directed; in a delightful self-consciousness in having done all the good in our power; in having employed our time to the glory of God, and the benefit of mankind.

But if happiness be the exercise of our faculties upon proper objects, that surely must be the noblest happiness when our minds are exercised upon the noblest objects.

How comes it then, that this great truth is generally overlooked—that those especially, who make the pursuit of happiness the great business of their lives; that those, who should command a more spacious prospect by standing upon higher ground, and enjoying a more commodious situation in the world, are yet as dead

dead to all sentiments of piety as the meanest peasant, or most illiterate mechanic? Why, the drudgery of business cannot more effectually sink and debase the mind of the latter, than a constant circle of gay follies does that of the former: for even innocent amusements, when too often repeated, and too much indulged, do as effectually destroy true piety as sensual pleasures themselves; because the mind, by being fixed on trifles, is disabled and indisposed for greater and more important business. These diversions, however innocent in themselves, may yet, by an excess of them, become criminal, as they are attended with very bad consequences; as they destroy all manliness of soul, and occasion that levity of temper, which exposes us to the inroads of temptation, and makes us susceptible of ill impressions. When steadiness, the anchorage of the soul, is once lost, she becomes the sport of the passions, and is carried away with every wind.

From this fountain, from that amazing folly of our great ones in running after every public entertainment, how trifling and ridiculous soever it may be, has flowed that fashionable indifference and disregard for every thing that is serious and sacred. The day which is more immediately set apart for the service and worship of God, is generally profaned; and an habit of gaming has extinguished every sentiment of devotion. Nor does the misfortune end here: inferiors are proud to form themselves upon the model of their superiors; and when those who are bound by all the ties of gratitude to that God who giveth them all things richly to enjoy, to advance the interests of religion, and to enlarge its empire, stamp a credit upon vice and irreligion, by this means a gate is opened to all manner of profaneness; men commonly thinking it some excuse for their crimes, if they can plead the example of their betters in favour of them.

What then? will some one say; is this your way to happiness? Must we bid adieu to all diversions? By no means. I would not be understood to decry amuse-

ments in general; I only condemn them, when they take up too much of our time, and interfere with nobler pursuits: for certainly we were not placed in this world, like the leviathan in the deep, only to take our pastime therein. There are duties to be performed by us; and, as a motive to our obedience, the great law-giver has made these duties and our happiness consistent with each other; they go hand in hand, and the pleasure which results from virtue is sufficient recommendation of it to our practice. Whoever relieved the indigent without feeling within himself the greatest complacency and satisfaction? Compare the pleasures of sobriety and temperance with those of rioting and excess; the sweet sleep of labour and industry with the broken and disturbed slumbers of idleness and luxury, and reason will soon convince you which deserves to have the preference.

We may therefore lay it down as a maxim of undoubted truth, that none is a greater epicure than the true sincere Christian; none are greater self-deniers than the abandoned in pleasure; as they cut themselves off from the most valuable enjoyments; as they contract a littleness of soul, and a disrelish and insensibility to every generous sentiment of humanity and goodness; as they must be obliged to a thousand trifles to fill up the mighty void of thought, to shut out that importunate intruder self-reflection, and to keep off that fullness which must come upon a mind conscious of no intrinsic worth; and when some years, each more flat and insipid than another, are thus spent, they have no reason to value this life, but merely because they are afraid of a future.

The conclusion of all is, happiness consists in our placing it upon true and proper objects. We have seen, that *the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life*, cannot secure it to us. Let us therefore seek for it where it is only to be found, in the practice of virtue and religion. And *pure and undefiled religion is this*, to relieve the distressed, to have an universal charity for all men, and to keep ourselves unspotted from the world.

S E R M O N CLII.

Delight in God the Origin and Perfection of human Pleasure.

PSALM xxxvii. 4.

Delight thyself also in the Lord, and he shall give thee the desires of thine heart.

PLEASURE, or the enjoyment of our heart's desire, being the chief spring of action in man, the due regulation of our pursuits of it must always be of great moment; and whoever addresseth us with an offer of this kind will justly demand, and can scarce fail of engaging, our attention. Now such a proposal the psalmist here makes to us all; directing our pursuits after pleasure to the great source of it, and informing us, that the sure method of attaining *the desire of our hearts is to delight in the Lord*. Which important truth I shall accordingly at present endeavour to make out, by shewing how all our pleasures point out to us, and are improved by, a delight in God.

And this I shall illustrate more particularly with regard, first, to the pleasures of sense and of imagination; and then to those moral and intellectual pleasures, of benevolence towards others, and of hope and expectation for ourselves.

To begin with sensual pleasures. Even these, though the lowest in the scale of enjoyment, should however always put us in mind who it is that gives us all the objects we enjoy, and the very power of enjoying them; otherwise, we shall deserve those severe rebukes which God gives the Israelites, by the prophet Isaiah: *The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib; but Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider*. And again, *The harp and the viol, the tabret and pipe, and wine, are in their feasts; but they regard not the work of the Lord, neither consider the operation of his hands*. It seems, they could enjoy the accommodations and gratifications of life, without ever carrying their thoughts upwards to that Being who *openeth his hand, and filleth all things living with plenteousness*.

And how justly may those among ourselves fall under the same condemnation, who either profanely neglect, or thoughtlessly forget, to crave the divine blessing upon their food, and to return thanks to

him for it! A duty enforced by the example and constant practice of our blessed Saviour; who (not to mention several other instances) *took the seven loaves and the two fishes, and gave thanks; a duty exemplified by St. Paul, when, as we read, he took bread, and gave thanks before them all; as well as recommended by his express declaration, where, speaking of meats, which (as he tells us) God hath created to be received with thanksgiving; he adds, for every creature of God is good, and nothing to be refused, if it be received with thanksgiving; for it is sanctified by the word of God (which has abolished the distinction of meats) and prayer*. And in another place, *he that eateth, eateth to the Lord; for he giveth God thanks*.—But because the example of Confucius may weigh more with some men than that of St. Paul, let me add what is observed of him—that he never eat any thing but he first prostrated himself, and offered it to the supreme Lord of heaven. In like manner, *whether we eat or drink, let us do all to the glory of God*. This will ennoble and improve our carnal gratifications, and exalt them into religious acts of gratitude and love.

And indeed, it is the mixture of some moral pleasure that gives the most agreeable relish to sensible pleasures: some grateful reflection on the person who bestows them; or some benevolent thoughts towards those with whom we share them. To *fare sumptuously every day* would be a very sordid indulgence, and of slender estimation, when entirely unaccompanied by a temper thankful to the Author of every good gift, and hospitable to our fellow-creatures. It is this that must give a refinement and delicacy to our pleasures, that must qualify that grossness which would otherwise render them nauseating and distasteful; and that must make every repast a rational entertainment.

What should farther be a strong motive with us in this respect to *delight in God*, is, that he has forbidden us no enjoyment, ordinarily speaking, but what, upon the whole, will bring more pain than pleasure; nor has he enjoined us any duty but what, all things considered, will yield us greater degrees of pleasure than of pain. True indeed it is, that the great duty of repentance does, in the nature of it, imply sorrow. But then this sorrow is productive

tive of, and succeeded by, a lasting substantial joy. Though our reformation has its pangs, yet we shall *no more remember the anguish, for joy that a new man is born into the world.*

If that variety of natural evils which appear in the world, and continually break in upon men's enjoyment of sensual pleasures, should be thought any objection against what has been advanced in recommendation of the duty of delighting in God; let it be remembered, that natural evils, such as pain, sickness, and calamity, are graciously designed by God as moral goods, by making us reflect and think; by teaching us patience and resignation; and by weaning our affections from things below. *Every branch that beareth not fruit, he taketh away; and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth, or pruneth, that it may bring forth more fruit:* that is, by some painful operation, which beareth a resemblance to pruning, he maketh every good man more good; as the branch that bore fruit before, becometh more fruitful, and deriveth new strength and additional vigour from the very steel.

So that, in short, those restraints on account of which religion may, at first sight, appear to be an enemy to sensual gratification, are in fact instances of her real friendship to it. Even self-denial is enjoined by God as the best preservative of self-enjoyment; since to enjoy ourselves we must learn to curb our appetites: and all seeming severity is really indulgence upon the whole. But further:

From the pleasures of the senses, let us proceed one step higher, to those of the imagination. And these are chiefly beauty, grandeur, and novelty.

As for the first; if the beauty of the visible world affect us, let us consider, who it is that has poured out this beauty upon the creation, himself infinitely more beautiful, lovely, and glorious; while he stands unseen behind the workmanship of his own hand.

We cannot unravel any one thing in the drama of nature, without bringing a God upon the scene. Every thing material convinceth us that there is, and must be, something immaterial behind the curtain.

When we see the sun shine forth in its lustre, and nature appearing in its most

advantageous dress, how can we avoid turning our thoughts upwards toward that Being whose *handy-work* that sun *shews*, and whose glory it declares, in a language understood by all mankind; a language, *the sounds whereof are gone into all lands, and its words into the ends of the world?* Every field, every flower, contains the most powerful, the most edifying rhetoric, to excite in us the love of that Being who *bath clothed the lilies of the field* with that elegant simplicity which was superior to Solomon's pomp when *arrayed in all his glory.* An unthinking mind, or a mind that is immersed in sensuality, may, without any emotions of gratitude or piety, survey the delightful round of the seasons, and the rich furniture of the earth, together with that numerous family of living creatures, for whose common benefit the universal Parent has designed it: a man of this turn may, I say, behold that variety of scenes which diversify the face of the creation, and present the most agreeable images to the mind, with a tasteless indifference and coldness to that Being who has poured out such stores of his bounty upon it: but he, who will be at any expence of thinking, will ponder these things till, by repeated reflections, the fire is kindled towards Him who has enriched the world with such a profusion of good; has beautified it with such order and harmony; and has ennobled it with such astonishing magnificence and grandeur.

Which puts me in mind of the second pleasure of the imagination, arising from greatness.

The soul is naturally formed for the love of what is great and marvellous. An august and stupendous building; a spacious and unbounded prospect; the unmeasurable expanse of the creation; naturally raise the soul into an unusual elevation, and fill it with sublime and vast ideas. Now this desire of surveying what is great, solemn, and majestic, was probably stamped upon our nature for this very purpose, that we might take delight in contemplating him of whose greatness there is no end. If we are flung into a pleasing astonishment at the view of any thing grand and magnificent, if our astonishment rises higher in proportion to the greater magnificence of the object, it must be improved into the highest pitch, when we have a direct and immediate

immediate knowledge of him whose essence is higher than heaven, and deeper than hell; the measure whereof is broader than the sea, and longer than the earth. Every body knows we hate nothing more than confinement in a prospect; the soul loves to have a free and unlimited range. And if even here, under all the incumbrances of the body, the soul expresses such a strong desire for infinitude; how much more will it delight therein, when unembarrassed by any clogs or impediments of matter?

The next pleasure of the imagination is that which is excited by novelty.

How comes it that we are generally in pursuit of something new; and yet, when we are possessed of it, and the object becomes familiar to us, it fades and languishes in our eyes, and palls upon the sense? Does not nature, by the repeated proofs of the unsatisfactoriness of things here below, admonish us to fix our rest upon him who alone can satisfy, and even exceed our wishes? whom the more we know, the more amiable we shall find him, and find no end of his perfections.

The Deity is to human minds what the ocean is to narrow vessels. They may receive some imperfect notices; they may take in as much as their scanty dimensions will admit; and yet there will remain an infinite surplus still, which we want room to receive; wishing that human nature was advanced to an higher perfection, that the divine Nature might be better understood, more perfectly loved, and more worthily praised.

Why, in short, does the fancy generally paint things beyond the life? Why does the happiness proposed from earthly objects seldom or never answer that lively imagery and gay colouring in which we had represented them? Has not the Deity so ordered it, that nothing here should fully equal our ideas and answer our expectations, but that the powers and extent of the imagination should go beyond the reality of things, for this very reason, that we might fix our thoughts upon those objects, the reality and perfection of which shall exceed the utmost stretch of the imagination, and which it hath not entered into the heart of man to conceive?

From the pleasures of the imagination let us proceed to those of a moral and

intellectual nature. And first let us consider the pleasures of benevolence.

If we are of benevolent dispositions, if it is a pleasure to us to please others, and to see them happy, how must we delight in that Being who is infinitely great and happy in his own nature, and infinitely good and communicative of happiness to his creatures! How must we rejoice in the thought, that the universe is under his administration, who will make virtue triumphant, who will not inflict misery upon any one individual, any farther than is necessary for the good of the whole! But above all, what generous and liberal thoughts shall we cherish of that person who, throughout his life, made virtue appear to be, what it is, a lovely form; and, by his death, made *satisfaction for the sins of the whole world*! How must it heighten our benevolence to man, as well as our love to God, to think, that all those whom we wish well to shall, upon the easy terms of faith and repentance, be *heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ*; no dregs of guilt remaining to defile the pure current of their happiness, no storms of adversity or misfortune to disturb or ruffle it! These are the genuine consequences of a relish for benevolence, as well as proper incentives to the love of God.

No doubt, our highest affection, in the reason of the thing, is a tribute due to God considered as the highest good: yet it must also be granted, that dry and abstracted reasons of love operate very faintly, unless we take into the account those affecting considerations of his being our creator, redeemer, preserver, and universal benefactor and parent. For this cause the scripture tells us *we love God because he first loved us*. His internal and essential excellency may claim our admiration, and convince the understanding that we ought to love him; but his relative dignity, his making, preserving, and redeeming us, touch the inmost springs and movements of our nature, and powerfully work upon the will and passions, the two active principles in the mind of man.

Let then, O man, thy labouring soul strive to conceive (for it is impossible to express) what an immense debt of gratitude thou owest to him who, by his creating goodness, called thee out of

nothing to make thee a partaker of reason, and even a sharer of immortality with himself; who, by his preserving goodness, designs to conduct thee safe through the various stages of thy eternal existence; and who, by his redeeming goodness, hath prepared for thee an happiness too big for the comprehension of an human understanding. Canst thou receive such endearments of love to thee and all mankind with insensibility and coldness? Shouldst thou treat a tender parent with an undutiful behaviour, we would call thee an unnatural monster; shouldst thou treat a generous benefactor with a disobliging behaviour, we would call thee base and ungrateful. Nay, shouldst thou use a brute creature, which expressed his kindness in the most significant manner he could, with cruelty, we would brand thee with the names of unmerciful and hard-hearted. But in the whole compass of language, what word is expressive enough to paint the black ingratitude of that man who is unaffected by, and entirely regardless of, the goodness of his Creator and the mercies of his Saviour? Did he, the *Lord of life and glory*, condescend to make the first advances of love and friendship to us, and shall not we cherish an affectionate remembrance and a grateful resentment of these his invaluable favours?

On the other hand, what a delightful complacency must diffuse itself over the mind of him who has the least tincture of good-will to the universe, to consider, that what he wished is brought about, the happiness of the whole universe of rational creatures, if it is not their own fault; and to think, at the same time, that he himself is in the happy number of them? To reflect, that he who *spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for our sakes, will, with him, also freely give us all things*, must beget in us a *delight* in him, of whom are all things, as he is our creator; *through whom* are all things, as he is our preserver; and *to whom* are all things, as he is our final happiness and sovereign good.

But this leads me from the pleasures of benevolence to consider those of hope and expectation.

Now present hope is present good; and a certain expectation of future blessings is, in some measure, a blessing in hand. Hope is the great cordial that must

sweeten life, and make the nauseous draught go down. We are indigent creatures, insufficient, of ourselves, for our own happiness, and therefore ever seeking it somewhere else. But where to seek it? There is the question. The thoughtful and pensive, who are enemies to the vanities of life, are eaten up with (what is the greatest vanity of all) a perpetual vexation of spirit, unless they direct their thoughts to, and *cast their care upon God*. No: if there were not another life, our business would be, not to alarm the thinking faculty, but to lull our too unquiet thoughts to rest. Our mind would be like a froward child, ever crying and fretful whilst awake, and therefore to be played and lulled asleep as fast as possible; and our main happiness would be, to steal ourselves gently and insensibly from a feeling of, or reflection upon, our misery.

If man had an ample fund of happiness within himself, without any deficiency, whence is it that he is continually looking out abroad for foreign amusements? Amusements which rather suspend the sense of uneasiness than give any substantial satisfaction; which keep the soul in an even poise between pleasure and pain, and are of no other use but to make us insensible of the tediousness of living, to fill up the vacant spaces of time, and to shut out that importunate intruder self-reflection. Whence is it, that that restless thing, the soul, too enterprizing to trace every thing, *yea the deep things of God*, is yet too cowardly to inquire into itself, and to view the inward workings of that ever-loved, yet ever-avoided object, itself? Whence is it, that the mind, whose active energy prompts it to give a free and unconfined range to her thoughts on other subjects, nay, to make, were that possible, the tour of the whole universe; yet, when she comes to dwell at home, and to survey the little world within, flags in her vivacity, feels herself in a forlorn condition, and finds a drowsiness and melancholy gloom hanging upon her? Whence is it, but because the soul, whenever it turns its thoughts inward, finds within itself a frightful void of solid happiness, without any possibility of filling it up?

Indeed, in a circle of gay follies, or in a multiplicity of business, when different objects are, in succession, continually striking

striking upon the mind, the capacity of the soul is taken up, and it forgets that inward poverty and indigence, which nothing can effectually relieve but the unsearchable riches of the love of God: but, when we step aside from the noise and beaten tracks of life into solitude and retirement, having no employment to fix, no recreation to dissipate, our thoughts, we soon find that we are an insupportable burden to ourselves without our God. Hence none is more miserable than a man distracted with variety of business, excepting him who has no business, no amusement at all. Recreations and pastimes, properly so called, (for they serve for no other end but to pass away our time,) may sooth the mind into a pleasing forgetfulness of its misery; but nothing can give us an exquisite relish and enjoyment of this life but the hopes of a better, through the merits of Jesus Christ.

Should any person ask then, "*Who will shew us any good? Who will point out the way to felicity to us?*" We must answer in the psalmist's words, *Lord, lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon us.*

What is happiness but the employment of the faculties of our souls upon suitable objects? How great then must our hope, how delightful our prospect, or rather anticipation, of happiness be, when our understandings are employed (and we are assured they ever shall be employed) in contemplating him who is infinite truth, and our affections in loving him who is infinite goodness! What a rational scheme of bliss have the scriptures therefore marked out to us, when they tell us, that, as to our wills and affections, *whom have we in heaven but God? and there is none upon earth that we should desire in comparison with God.* In comparison, the psalmist says, to intimate that we may love other things subordnately to him. *Our flesh and our heart may fail; but God is the strength of our heart, and our portion for ever.* And, in other places, that *we shall be filled with all the fulness of God; and that we shall drink of his pleasures as out of a river.*—And then, as to our understandings, that *we shall know as we ourselves are known; that in God's light we shall see light; and that we shall see him as he is.* And how greatly (too greatly for our present far

unequal conceptions) will the understanding be enlightened, when God shall shine forth immediately upon it in the fulness of his glory, when we shall be as conscious of his enlivening presence as we are of our own existence; as sensible of his unerring approbation as we are of the testimony of our own consciences!

O blessed state, when I shall *behold face to face*, or have a direct view of what is infinitely lovely; love what I behold; and be made happy in the enjoyment of what I love; the first and best of Beings; great and marvellous in his works, just and righteous in his ways; but infinite and incomprehensible in his nature!

God hath styled himself light: and as the whole material creation would be involved in one black, horrid, and uncomfortable gloom, if light did not enliven it with its smiles, and beautify it with a rich variety of colours; so would the spiritual creation live in an eternal blackness of darkness, did not God *lift up the light of his countenance* upon it; brightening it with the beams of his truth, and cheering it with the influence of his favour.

In short, and to conclude:—Earthly objects may indeed swell and puff up the soul with unsubstantial bliss, but nothing can fill up every void in the mind, and satisfy the whole compass of our desires with the fulness of solid and unmingled happiness, but that supreme good, who pervades every part of matter, fills infinite space, and *inhabits eternity*; that Being *who is above all, and through all, and in us all!*

First and best of Beings! before whom *ten thousand angels stand, and ten thousand times ten thousand minister unto thee!* Look down from that variety of exalted creatures; angels, archangels, cherubim, and seraphim, approaching gradually nearer the top of the scale, but still at an infinite distance from thy perfections! Look down from them upon us, whom thou hast made, the lowest of accountable beings—upon us, who have made ourselves yet lower by our manifold sins and transgressions. Imprint this truth deep in proportion to its value—man's sickly distempered soul, though it should for ever turn and shift from side to side in search of quiet, can rest in nothing but

thee, its pillar and support here, in full trust of the fulness of joy hereafter.

SERMON CLIII.

Of Anger, Meekness, &c.

EPHES. iv. 26.

Be ye angry, and sin not.

HOWEVER unequal the dispensation of Providence, upon a careless and transient view, may seem to be; yet, upon a more close and accurate survey, we shall find a greater equality therein than we were aware of. Thus, for instance, the men in whose composition fire and spirit are the predominant ingredients, have generally much nobler designs, and are capable of greater attainments, than those of a phlegmatic and more dispassionate make. But then the same life and energy which pushes on the former to undertake generous and heroic actions, often precipitates them into fatal excesses. If they are more than the common run of men in some respects, Providence, to humble them and reduce them to a level with their fellow-creatures, has left them in danger of being less than men in others: when they do well, nobody better; and when ill, nobody worse. Whereas the men of cooler and more saturnine constitutions resemble the colder countries; which, though they are not productive of those generous fruits and rich metals that ennoble the hotter climates, are yet free from several noxious and baneful animals wherewith the other abound. The affections in these are gentle ferments working in the breast, which hinder it from settling into inactivity, but do not transport it into exorbitances and intemperate heats. They can more easily observe the apostle's precept, *Be ye angry, and sin not.*

Since the scripture every where not only condemns the grosser acts of vice, but forbids the least approach or tendency to it; the apostle's meaning cannot be this; "indulge yourselves in anger, provided you sin not." No; we must not go to the utmost verge of what we call lawful anger, lest we be unawares betrayed into what is not so. Thin partitions divide the frontiers between what is merely innocent and what is unlawful; and the transition from the one to the

other is almost insensible, and therefore almost unavoidable. He that escapeth danger is a fortunate man; but he that does not wantonly throw himself into it is a wise man. After we have once given the reins to our passion, it becomes an unequal task to stop it where we please; it is in vain to say, *hitherto shalt thou go, and no farther.* The much wiser expedient is to shorten the line of our liberty, and to watch the first emotions of anger. St. Paul's meaning I therefore take to be this: "If you should happen to be angry, take care that you do not sin."

There are some who put so strict an interpretation on this text as supposes us to sin if we are angry at all; and consequently that anger is in itself sinful. But this is straining the words to a sense which is neither easy nor natural; which is not countenanced from other plain parts of scripture; and which cannot be justified on the principles of morality. For anger is one of the passions, and of the same essential kind with the others that are implanted in our natural frame. Now, though God in the beginning made man upright, and free from any incursion of irregular passions; yet he must have foreseen the defects and frailties that our nature would become subject to by the original transgression; and foreseeing would not, we may safely say, suffer any thing absolutely and in itself sinful or evil to remain in the essential constitution of our nature. On the contrary, the passions seem to be the material subject out of which all our moral virtue is formed. The sum of our moral duty consists in bringing them to, and preserving them in, a true balance. To endeavour therefore to root them out of the human composition, in order to render the operations of our reason more perfect and easy, would be just as rational a project, as it would be to destroy all the subjects of a prince in order to render his government the more complete and absolute. In a word, the true and just character of man is not to be without passions, but to bring them all to a proper temper.

The passions, it is true, without reason to prescribe and moderate their motions, would, like the common men in an army, make but wild and disorderly work; and therefore after their first rising they ought not to stir one step without regular orders: but under a prudent conduct it will be found

found that the interest of moral virtue will be greatly promoted by their force and activity. It is not the bare apprehension of what is right that determines us to act with vigour and resolution in the pursuit of it; nor is it the bare discernment of what is wrong that creates in us a sufficient aversion to it. No: our perception and judgment, in both cases, must be reinforced by some more active and alarming principles; in the former case like spurs to incite, in the latter like bits to restrain: and these different offices do our different passions respectively undertake, and effectually execute.

Since then the simple act or exercise of the passions is in itself indifferent, and becomes either good or otherwise, by the circumstance of the object to which it is directed, the end it designs, and the degree of temper wherewith it pursues that end; I propose in the following discourse to shew,

Ist, In what cases our anger may be innocently indulged.

IIIdly, When it becomes intemperate and unlawful.

IIIIdly, As a general motive to restrain us from intemperate anger, I will consider the nature of its opposite virtue, meekness. And,

Lastly, Subjoin some more special considerations for the same purpose.

First, then, I am to shew in what cases our anger may be innocently indulged.

And here, that we may be able to form a more exact judgment of the particular cases I shall mention, it will be proper to apprise ourselves of the true idea of anger; which is defined, "a displeasure of the mind arising from the apprehension of injury, together with a desire of removing it." Injury must here be distinguished from natural evil, which may be brought upon us either by men undesignedly, by brute creatures, or even by things inanimate; but injury is evil with design, and therefore of a moral consideration.

Again, The desire of removing injury, or the vindication of ourselves from injury, must be distinguished from revenge: the latter supposes a return of injury, and nothing but a return of injury; but the former, though it may design bringing evil or punishment on the injurious person, yet it designs it not as it is evil, but as it is good: that is, that it may tend

to, and procure his amendment and reformation; and therefore such a return is not revenge.

From these things thus premised, it will not be difficult to comprehend that our anger may be innocently indulged.

1. On the approach of any injurious aggressor threatening our destruction, or using any act of violence that may endanger our safety—Here the first motions of our anger spring from the principle of self-preservation, and are so sudden and impetuous as often to prevent deliberation; they are, in truth, common to us, with children, and the very brutes; and therefore the actions immediately consequent upon and produced by them, come rather under a natural than a moral denomination. An additional proof however, that anger in itself is not sinful. But still, on the most mature deliberation, we must be justified in consulting our own security, according to the degrees of the impending danger; and in cases of extreme necessity, that is, where no other possible means can be contrived for our preservation, we may repel force by force, and bring that destruction on the head of our enemy which otherwise he would have brought upon ours. Nor can this properly be called revenge; for our principal design here is, not to inflict a deserved injury, but to guard against an injury undeserved; and we would have chosen his safety, had it been consistent with our own, without proceeding to this fatal extremity.

And here, considering the daring and desperate tempers of many wicked men; the weak impressions they feel of any religious principle or sentiment of humanity; the small dread they have of the extremest punishment that human laws can inflict; and the many opportunities they may find of secrecy to execute their villanous purposes; we cannot but admire the good providence of God, and be thankful to him *whose mercies are over all his works*, that so few of us, in comparison, are ever brought into these great dangers. *The wicked watched against the righteous, and seeketh occasion to slay him: the Lord will not let him come into his hand.* But to return.

2. How far soever the harsh gratings of anger may seem to be removed from the soft motions of benevolence, yet these sometimes, as oil does to steel, give

an edge to our resentment; where it will be found not only innocent and excusable, but even commendable and generous. How are we affected with an historical relation, a theatrical representation, or even a poetical and feigned description of villany under the disguise of friendship; helpless innocence betrayed, dishonoured, or oppressed; merciless cruelty inflicted, and the like? Our heart burns within us full of resentment and indignation, and our tears force their way. These movements are deep-grounded in our nature, and therefore irresistible: and if such be their force in the case of fiction or bare narration, we cannot suppose it either is, or ought to be, diminished by reality: and if they carry us so far in behalf of others, they must be allowed at least an equal scope and liberty in behalf of ourselves.

Hence it appears that benevolence, disinterested benevolence, presides in human nature, and unites mankind into a society so intimate, that, however distant the several members may be, one common sensation as it were runs through the whole. And as in the natural system of the world there are some repelling qualities, which yet must conspire to aid the grand power of attraction, so even those passions which, considered in a simple view, have but an unfriendly and unfociable aspect, are yet, in their general comprehension, aiding and assisting to preserve inviolable the bonds of the great community.

3. Our anger is apt to kindle at the apprehension of a slight or an affront; a contempt or reproach thrown upon us: on which occasions, if the apprehension be well-grounded, our resentment, to a certain degree, must be allowed to be excusable, and so not sinful. Our tameness in these instances would be construed into stupidity, and be treated as such by the pert and petulant. Peace and honesty, and the reputation of honesty, are the greatest worldly possessions that many men have, or desire to have; and the invaders of them, especially they who take a pleasure in or make a sport of depriving others of the enjoyment of them by an unmannerly behaviour, rude insults, or provoking language, may be, and ought to be treated with such marks of disapprobation and displeasure as may be a sufficient guard for us against the assaults

of these trespassers: nay, I do not know but a greater indulgence may be allowed to our resentment on these occasions, where human laws have not allowed us the privilege of their assistance and protection.

But it may be inquired, How is the lawfulness of anger, in all or any of the foregoing instances, consistent with the command given by our Saviour, *not to resist evil*; but to subdue our nature to such a degree of passiveness, as, if *any one should smite us on the right cheek, to turn to him the other also*?

I answer, these words admit of an interpretation very consistent with what has been advanced in defence of lawful anger. The law of retaliation was here the subject of our Saviour's discourse, which either in its original intention did, or rather perhaps by the corrupt glosses of the Jewish doctors was made to signify a repaying in kind every bodily injury a man received; *an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth*. Accidental and undesigned injuries were excepted out of this law; and therefore we must consider the injuries included in it to be injuries strictly speaking; that is, accompanied with malice and hatred. Accordingly, the temper of the aggressor, in the instance before us, is apparently malicious; and this temper our Saviour condemns to such a degree, as to command us rather to submit to such malicious treatment doubly, than return it once. The greatest indignities a Christian can suffer will not justify in him a spirit of malice and revenge; *he is to recompense no man evil for evil*: but there is a very distinct medium between this, and consulting no methods at all for his redress, even of the smallest injuries; and that is, by endeavouring to obtain such redress, by innocent means, which are plainly these; that, in bringing the offender to punishment, or to a sense of his miscarriage, we take care the degrees of our resentment do not exceed the nature of the offence; and that we have a regard, not only to our own good, but to that of the public, and even to that of the offender himself, without being acted by the least mixture of malice. And thus it is that a parent resents and punishes disobedience, or other misbehaviour, in his child; and yet retains for him at the same time the highest degrees of benevolence.

4. We may not only be *angry* without sinning, in the instances alleged, as we sometimes may *sin* in *not* being angry. God, who designed human society, designed the good of it; and that good to be promoted by every individual to the utmost of his power. Hereby there is tacitly committed to every man a kind of trust and guardianship of virtue, whose rights he is obliged to support and maintain in proportion to his abilities; not only by example, by advice and exhortation, but even by reproof and resentment suitable to the circumstances of the offender and the offence. Whoever therefore can bring himself to a careless and cold indifferency, or calm unconcernedness in hearing any profane or impious discourse, or in beholding any cruel, outrageous, or oppressive action, becomes in some measure an encourager and abettor of them, and makes himself accountable for them in proportion to his power of preventing them. And consequently they who obtain any degree of superiority, (whether natural, as that of parents, or civil, as that of magistrates and governors,) are still under more weighty obligations, not only to note and censure but even to check and chastise the irregularities, the faults and vices of those under their immediate care and inspection. Their authority is an additional ground for their resentment; and their resentment will greatly enforce their authority. Anger manifests itself in so many awful forms as never fail of affecting the imagination, and leaving sometimes very memorable impressions. When the children of Israel were guilty of a gross act of idolatry in worshipping the golden calf, we read that *Moses's anger was exceeding hot, and he brake the tables of the covenant.* It has been remarked, that Moses did not break the tables till he approached near the camp, that he might the better testify his resentment against, and make those idolaters more sensible of their great wickedness. And, lest this example of Moses should be thought insufficient for authorizing our practice, we have the example of a *greater than Moses* to justify and encourage it, which is that of our Saviour himself, who was *so grieved* with the Pharisees for *the hardness of their heart, that he looked about on them with anger.* This is a sufficient warrant for allowing anger and resentment a place in our re-

proving the vices of children, servants, or others placed in any degree of subjection to us: the danger often lies in the contrary excess; too great lenity and forbearance. How great a guilt is hereby incurred will best appear by the severity of its punishment in Eli the high-priest of Israel, and at the same time a supreme magistrate and a father. Let every father hear, and those who are guilty tremble at the denunciation of God's judgment, which was afterwards punctually fulfilled: *And the Lord said, I will perform against Eli all things which I have spoken concerning his house: I will judge his house for ever, for the iniquity which he knoweth: because his sons made themselves vile, and he restrained them not.* As Eli was otherwise a strictly religious and good man, we should have been weak enough to think that forgiveness might have been extended to a single failing; a failing of this sort in a father, a very old father! No, it was a sin that *was not to be purged away with sacrifice nor offering for ever.*

But forasmuch as the occasions of exercising lawful anger are but few; and resentment does not want so often or so much to be excited where it may be proper, as to be curbed and restrained where it is not so; let us consider,

II. Idly, When our anger becomes intemperate and unlawful. And it is undeniably so,

1. When it breaks out into outrageous actions; for then, like a boisterous wind, it quite puts out that light which should *guide our feet in the way of peace*; it dethrones reason, and suspends its exercise. An extravagance of this kind is the more dangerous, and therefore the more sinful, because, though the impulse of passion should meet with no opposition to inflame it, which however is generally the case; yet when it has worked the blood into so violent a ferment, it is apt of itself to redouble its force: and no one can tell what fury, wound up to the highest pitch, may produce. A man is now become the instrument of his own passion, and may be made to act such tragedies as he could not think of before without horror. Great reason therefore have we to implore the grace of God, that we be not led so far into this temptation. The man that an hour before seemed to be guided by a sober sense of religion, is now got beyond

the line of reason, and is seen to break through all the restraints of decency, humanity, and virtue, to satiate his vengeance in the blood of his fellow-creatures. A passionate man is every moment liable to do that which he may ever after repent : like the *horse rushing into the battle*, and by a savage and fierce instinct bearing down all before him, but receiving wounds the pains whereof will ever after be felt. For the pleasure which arises from the gratifying this passion is but momentary ; it is like the lightning that gilds the storm, a flash of joy, and then all again is overcast, gloomy, and frightful.

2. Anger becomes unlawful when it vents itself in unseemly and reviling language. It were to be wished that those, who have such a peculiar delicacy of feeling when they are affronted, would abstain from all appearance of an affrontive and disrespectful behaviour to others ; that they who are so quick to receive would be as slow to give an affront. On the contrary, it often happens that they only feel for themselves ; they are not the least sensible of the indignities offered to others. How frequently do those who are highly enraged pass a general and undistinguishing censure upon a man's character ? they allow nothing commendable in it. Contrary to the rules of candid artists, whatever is beautiful is either overlooked or thrown into shades ; whatever is deformed, is exaggerated, heightened, and exposed in the fullest light. And on this view they pronounce judgment, and *shoot out their arrows, even bitter words*, little regarding how deep they wound ; though frequently, like poisoned arrows, the wounds they give are incurable.

Some indeed are too apt to excuse themselves, and express their hopes, and imagine that God will forgive them, because they pretend they are borne away into such extravagant licences by a sudden discomposure of mind, which quite transported them beyond themselves. And it must be allowed that sometimes he who has virtue very much at heart may, on a sudden surprise of passion, be tempted to *speak unadvisedly with his lips*. But it happens but too frequently that those who put in this plea have no claim to it. For what, if this passion which they pretend to be a frailty prove really a fault ? And in general it will be found, that haughty opprobrious language is not so much owing

to a man's sudden temptations to anger as to an inward standing habit of contempt, which that occasional temptation, by throwing him off his guard, manifested and exposed to view. A secret unsuspected pride then, the settled temper of our minds, may be the original cause of disdainful and contemptuous expressions, and a surprise of passion only the occasion of discovering that temper by such expressions.

In vain therefore do such persons seek to screen themselves from guilt, by resting the occasion of it on the ungoverned bursts or unguarded sallies of passion, since they habitually encourage another ill affection of the mind, which is sure to set their passion at work. As well may the intemperate complain that they cannot secure themselves against the attacks of many distempers from the weakness of their constitution, when their intemperance has been the true occasion of that weakness. But,

3dly, We are not always to judge of the sinfulness of anger from the open and undisguised appearance of it, either in our words or actions : it may be concealed and treasured up in our thoughts, and yet retain as much malignity as when it immediately breaks out and discovers itself in contumelious language or acts of violence ; for by brooding in the mind, it becomes the parent of a very untoward issue, malice and hatred.

Malice is a cool and deliberate resentment ; but sometimes more keen and malevolent than that which is rash and precipitate. It is like a massy stone, slowly raised, but threatening the greater danger to him on whom it shall fall. Many, I question not, are apt to soothe themselves with the deceitful thought that they are men of temper and patience, because, on very great provocations, they can so far smother and suppress the first impulse of passion as not to betray any strong symptoms of it ; when all the while their coolness is owing to nothing better than their cowardice. The veil that is flung over their fury does not alter its real complexion, it only enables it to act with less suspicion, and therefore with greater security at a more proper opportunity. The heat of anger thus concealed then may be as injurious as that which immediately discharges itself, and evaporates in a sudden flame : but the guilt of the malicious

malicious is aggravated in this, that he acts with more deliberation than those of a hot and fiery temper. He has time to debate the matter coolly with himself; to call in the counsels of reason and prudence; and to sue for the succours of grace. All this he may do, and ought to do: and if either through a wilful omission of this, or in spite of all the remonstrances of reason and conscience, he still perseveres in the determined resolution of executing his wicked purposes, his sin, thus heightened with every circumstance of presumption, becomes exceeding sinful.

But farther, anger is yet sinful when encouraged in our thoughts to the degree of hatred. For though our resentment, in this view, may not run so high as to suggest any evil designs of injuring a man in his person or property; or though it should spare, what it very seldom spares, his reputation; yet still it is apt to cherish an evil disposition towards him. It inclines us to rejoice at the misfortunes that befall him, or at least to be unconcerned for them; it restrains many acts of our benevolence towards him, when it would be equally our own interest to perform them; nay, it may turn away our eyes from him in the day of his extreme adversity and affliction.

Now it is certain there is no man, who retains the least sense of humanity, but wishes to live in a good understanding with all mankind; abstracting from every consideration but the pleasing reflection that naturally arises in the mind from such a situation. The reason of this we need not inquire at present: it is enough that every man feels this social desire so strong in his own heart. Why then will any one chuse to practise such a strange sort of self-denial as to rob his own breast of such pleasurable emotions, for no reason but to rob his fellow-creatures of the same? This is not only hindering good, or, what amounts to the same, doing evil for evil's sake (the temper of the most accursed spirit): it is yet worse; it is doing evil to ourselves for the sake of doing evil to others. But, "Is it not a pleasure to us when we rejoice at the misfortunes of others; and therefore are we not still in the possession of pleasure?" A pleasure it is, but a pleasure arising from passion only; a pleasure that will not endure the test of reason, or the survey of reflection; and therefore an unnatural, brut-

ish, and savage pleasure: all which is evident from this, that, when time has in part obliterated, and at last totally effaced the deformed image of hatred, we find a thorough complacency and satisfaction at the retreat and final farewell of so unwelcome a guest. And this is still farther confirmed from the joy that arises on the reconciliation of persons at variance. What tumultuous transports, think we, must have filled the hearts of Jacob and Esau at their first interview; when the current of brotherly love had been so long interrupted between them? Take the account of it in the inimitable simplicity of scriptural language: *And Jacob lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold Esau came, and Jacob bowed himself to the ground seven times, until he came near to his brother; and Esau ran to meet him, and embraced him, and fell on his neck, and kissed him: and they wept.*

Were ever revenge, malice, or hatred, accompanied with such grateful sensations, such kindly overflowings of joy and gladness in the heart? No: benevolence, on such occurrences, asserts the right of supreme dominion in the human constitution, and triumphs over all the tribe of the unsocial affections. We are convinced of our folly in revolting from her gentle sway to be enslaved by tyrants and terrified by monsters. This conviction turns our hearts; which again are softened by a mixture of shame and repentance for our fault: and now, joy pouring in upon them, the joy of being restored to the peaceful possession of ourselves, and replaced in the affection of our friends, excites those distressful, yet pleasing agonies, which seek for relief in the like distressful and pleasing flow of our tears.

Do men ever take delight in being witnesses of the quarrels, animosities, and heart-burnings among either friends or enemies? But, on such occasions as these, when tears testify the sincerity of mutual affection of hearts reconciled and united, who can so far restrain his joy as not to rejoice with those that do rejoice, and at the same time to weep with those that weep?

Thus we find, whenever our anger rises so high as to stop or drive back the streams of benevolence, it throws us into an uneasy, violent, and convulsive state. And hence it appears that the command of *loving our enemies*, which has been thought

thought a *hard saying*, and impossible to be fulfilled, is really no more, when resolved into its first principles, than bidding us be at peace with ourselves; which we cannot be so long as we continue at enmity with others. The command is not less agreeable to the true spirit of morality than it is to that love and charity which breathes through all the gospel.

And in conformity to this, and the view that we have taken of the general cases of sinful anger; let me apply the words of the apostle, exhibiting the natural gradations of it: *Let all bitterness, and wrath, and evil-speaking, be put away from you, with all malice.* As a general motive to which I proceed as I proposed, in the

III. Third place, to consider its opposite virtue, meekness.

This was a virtue which our blessed Saviour was pleased in an especial manner to recommend in his own example: *Learn of me, for I am meek and lowly in heart.* The characters of persons are generally strongly marked in scripture; and though two men are described as having the same quality, yet it is diversified as to some particulars in each. It has some distinguishing features which shew it to be that man's and not another's. There is not a more remarkable instance of this than the difference of behaviour in our Saviour and St. Paul under the same treatment. Both of them were struck in a court of judicature: but the one of them replies, *If I have done evil, bear witness of the evil; but if well, why smitest thou me?* The other, *God shall smite thee, thou whited wall: for sittest thou to judge me after the law, and commandest me to be smitten contrary to the law?* Both of them speak in character: our Saviour, with that well-governed spirit and gentle wisdom which kept him at the utmost distance from unruly passion; the apostle, with that animated and spirited wisdom which, though it did not suffer him to say any thing but what such an extraordinary provocation warranted, or to be transported into unlawful anger, yet he stood on the very confines of what was so. In a word, the conduct of our Saviour presents us with a pattern, an unallayed pattern, of meekness; that of the apostle seems not quite free from a certain tincture of human frailty.

Meekness is, as Aristotle long ago de-

fined it, a due mean between tameness and stupidity on the one hand, and rage and fury on the other. It is not absolute freedom from passion, but such a command over it as to prevent our being transported beyond the bounds of humanity and good sense. It is this virtue which, if it does not give a man such a glaring and shining figure as some other good qualities, yet constitutes the most lovely, beautiful, and agreeable character, and gains unenvied praise. If it does not draw the eyes of the world so much upon its possessor, and attract our admiration as some other accomplishments, yet nothing endears us more to the affection of mankind than the *ornament of a meek and quiet spirit.*

But to be more particular, let us take a view of this virtue in its peculiar symptoms and characters. And,

1st, A meek man will have sense enough to know when he is injured, and spirit enough to resent it: but then he will consider whether he can do more good by openly resenting an offence and punishing the offender, than by overlooking it and passing it by. It is a rule with him never to say or do any unkind thing except when there is some necessity for it, either with regard to himself or the public. And the reason is as follows: where there is no reason for severity, when no valuable and desirable end can be compassed thereby, there is always a reason against it; "it is an unnecessary and useless severity." Nay, he cannot even see a person in pain, though he does not give it, without feeling in some measure what he sees.

As soon as any affront is offered, it is the language of passion, "Such an indignity is not to be borne! Such an offence is intolerable! it would be tameness not to punish it." But if calm reason might put in its plea, it would say; "What benefit do you propose to yourself? Do you take vindictive measures merely to gratify your exorbitant passion, a turbulent incendiary in your breast, which is a greater enemy to your peace than any you have? Or is it your intention to reform the injurious person; to promote the welfare of society and your own?"

2dly, A man of a meek temper will distinguish between a man's general standing sentiments, when he is perfectly calm

and undisturbed; and his occasional sentiments, when his spirits are ruffled and over-heated. He will consider what he is for a constancy towards him, and what he may be now and then when some cross accident may have soured his temper, or some passion clouded and disturbed his reason. And such a consideration is absolutely necessary to preserve friendship, and to keep up peace and harmony among those that live constantly or converse often together. No union could be lasting if every thing that was occasionally let fall should be gathered up and circulated with the additions which are generally made by officious and sometimes malicious intermeddlers. Unkindly thoughts, which vent themselves in unfriendly expressions, may be only occasional visitants which tarry but an hour; whereas tender and endearing sentiments of us may be the constant and welcome inhabitants of the mind. A meek man will never break off any intimacy with a friend upon the account of some angry reflexions unsuitable to his general habitual way of thinking; he will consider it is impossible to maintain a friendly intercourse without making allowances for such infirmities. And he who says or thinks he has discharged every duty, without any failure in point of kindness and friendliness to his domestics and near neighbours, has forgot one duty in respect of himself, that of self-examination: for the least recollection will serve to shew that he has sometimes, to persons near him or about him, said or done things that had better been left unsaid or undone; and has omitted to do kind things which ought to have been done; that he has been out of humour sometimes when there was not sufficient reason to be so, and has gone too far when there was. A man of a gentle nature will therefore make proper abatements, and be inclined to think that, as a generous enemy may sometimes, through a flush of good humour and an extraordinary flow of spirits, say a handsome thing in our behalf, and deviate into praise; so a firm friend, through a surprize of ill-humour, may put on an angry look, or drop a disobliging expression.

And whereas a hasty temper is immediately for proceeding to extremities, a meek temper goes more leisurely to work, and consults the softest seasons of address to advise with a man: perhaps he has not

said it; and, if he have, that he say it no more. And indeed without such a procedure all friendships would be precarious; they would lie at the mercy of every one that was malicious enough to do us an ill office.

3dly, A meek man will never be angry with a person for telling him what he imagines to be a fault in him, provided it be done in a private manner, and the advice be conveyed in the most palatable vehicle. For should the fault be purely imaginary, and the censure wrong directed, yet no harm is done, and he will be obliged to his friendly adviser for his good intentions; but if the censure should fall in the right place, he will be doubly obliged to him, both for his good intentions and for the real good he hath done him, by shewing him to himself, and putting it in his power to make himself better by correcting his mistakes.

When a friend gives us to understand that he has our interest at heart, this opens all the avenues to our mind; strengthens and enforces his admonitions; so that they never fail to make deeper impressions upon us than the most masterly strokes of a book of morality. We consider the author as influenced by a motive of doing good in general, whereas the friend is actuated by a concern for us in particular; and this gives a considerable weight to his advice. They who speak affectionately and sincerely from their own hearts, generally speak affectionately and powerfully to the hearts of others. And the plain language of an open heart, a frank and undesigning breast, sooner stamps conviction upon the mind than the well-turned periods and artificial ornaments of the finest orator that ever lived.

4thly, A man of a meek spirit is glad to be reconciled to the person who has offended or injured him, and therefore is ready to hearken to all overtures of accommodation. When he who hath made himself an adversary comes and accosts him with the salutation of Jehu to Jonadab: *Is thy heart right, as my heart is with thy heart? if it be, give me thy hand;* he answers with Jonadab, *It is,* and gives him his hand. He receives him with open arms, as a friend returning from a strange country. Indeed when a man sits in judgment on a cause between himself and us, and gives sentence in our favour, what can we desire more? The
-offence

offence was the effect of passion, the acknowledgment the result of reason. To appease our passion he has made a sacrifice of his own; and shall we not accept the offering, but sacrifice our reason, and even our humanity, to our passion? Such an humble demeanour, one would think, should bring down even the *high looks of the proud*; because he finds his adversary has done, what he himself thinks the most difficult of all things to be done; he has divested himself of pride. A meek man however on such occasions will call to mind the command of our Saviour: *If thy brother trespass against thee seven times in a day, and seven times in a day return unto thee, saying, I repent; forgive him.* A command that carries with it two suppositions, either of them sufficient to subdue the most stubborn and unrelenting heart: *If thy brother trespass against thee seven times in a day*—a sad intimation of the hourly infirmities which human nature is liable to! an object of our pity, though we were not in the same condemnation: but as we are, and as he is our brother, the sense of pity ought to strike the deeper. And moreover, *if he turn unto thee*; if conscious of his fault, he comes to us as if we were in God's stead, professes his repentance, and beseeches our pardon; we should be almost ashamed of accepting such condescension and submission, and be sorry that we did not prevent this humble application by a voluntary tender of forgiveness: forgiveness! alas, what can we forgive? his sin? Human pride has not yet pretended to assume that power, and human piety will pray God to forgive it; and it may be, God has forgiven it on our brother's repentance. But his punishment? Man, sinful man, is ready and willing to think himself a proper object of God's mercy; and yet can hardly bear to think a man, less sinful than himself, the object of his own.

In few words: A meek man will shew such an inclination and readiness to forgive the offences of others, as if he had perpetual need of the same indulgence: but will so carefully avoid giving the least offence, as if it might be thought he would forgive nobody.

If the view we have taken of this peaceable, gentle, and amiable virtue has not made impression sufficient to mortify us against the excessive degrees of anger; let us,

Lastly, Call in to our farther assistance some more direct and particular considerations. And,

1st, It is very weakly objected by some, that it is not in their power to withstand and quell the outrageous assaults of passion. This may be very true, if they have taken no pains for that purpose. Our passions are naturally of the unruly kind; and in order to bring them under due command, much labour and not less skill and management are required. And it would not be amiss, perhaps, if a man were to prescribe a particular course of discipline over each of them in their turn; during which time, besides a general regard, they should demand his especial and most particular care. This seems to have been the method of a renowned emperor; renowned, not more for his admirable government of the Roman empire, than for the equally admirable government of himself. And if the order of his meditations was guided by that of his practice, it is pertinent to remark, that he began his home-regulation by acquiring a gentleness of behaviour and a freedom from passion.

Now, if nothing of this kind hath been attempted by those who are so ready to complain of their infirmities, as if they took a secret satisfaction in them; all that we can collect from their complaint is, that in effect *they charge God foolishly*; they charge that on his workmanship which is owing to their own gross negligence.

But notwithstanding all this, it is almost impossible for them not to recollect some occasions when, upon the foresight and expectation of some quarrelsome and litigious interview, they have resolved to be upon their guard; and, by such resolution, have foreclosed and dammed up every inlet of extravagant passion. They must recollect likewise some other less guarded seasons, when they suffered themselves to be borne away with the tempest of rage, (and were thereby betrayed into the greatest indecencies,) upon cool reflection afterwards, they were almost as angry with themselves for their indiscretion in letting loose the reins of their fury. A virtual confession this, that it was owing to their own neglect, in not seasonably setting a watch *before the door of their lips*; and by that precaution, holding their tongues *as it were with a bridle*.

God

God certainly did not give us reason, that distinguishing prerogative of our nature, that candle which he hath lighted up in our breasts, to be blown out with every accidental gust of passion; to be as a *reed shaken with every wind*, and broken down by any strong one. Either we have strong passions, or we have not: if we have not, we derive from nature that happy composure of temper, and that absence of revengeful thoughts, which others must take great pains to acquire by all the helps of religion and philosophy; and therefore we, *who are strong*, ought to be more ready to *bear with the infirmities of the weak*. If we have strong, vigorous, and warm passions, then those sparks are capable of inflaming the soul with a strong desire of attaining, and giving it a kind of additional life and spirit actually to attain, every thing that is great, worthy, and honourable. The passions are the wings that enable us to rise above every thing that is despicable, low, and earthly; and therefore should dispose us to contemn, or more easily to conquer, every thing that lies in our way to the most excellent wisdom and most sublime virtue.

In short, it may not be in our power always to speak and act so well as we might wish, for want of abilities or opportunities; but it is always in our power to forbear acting or speaking.

2dly, We may call to mind a whole sect of philosophers, with their followers, who, by the mere power of discipline, (enforced purely by considerations drawn from the dignity of human nature, self-repose, and benevolence to mankind,) entirely suppressed all the disorderly ferments of passion, and that on the most trying occasions. Now, methinks, a disciple of Jesus Christ should blush to observe, that the weak and beggarly elements of philosophy should have empowered the espousers of them to reach a more sublime point in the practice of any virtue than the divine energy of the holy scriptures: those scriptures which do not only enjoin and encourage the practice of all meekness and gentleness from the most engaging and interesting motives, but which exhibit the most perfect pattern of them in our Lord and Master; who left it too as the distinguishing mark of his true disciples, that they *should love one another*: those scriptures which will render him

that reads them with a proper disposition, *thoroughly furnished to every good work*; with a disposition influenced by that *Holy Spirit* which will lead us into all truth, and incline us to all goodness. But it is with religion as it is with government; the best constitution of government, ill-administered, will not produce such salutary effects as a bad one, whose laws are duly enforced. It would be too long, in this place, to enter into a detail of the reasons why the practice of Christians falls so short of their principles. To save the honour of our holy religion, at present let it only be observed, (what is greatly to the dishonour of mankind,) that a wrong principle, if it meets with a strong opposition, will often carry men farther in support of it than one that is grounded on sound reason and true religion, if left to act at its own liberty, and meeting with no control. The stoics thought all the passions absolutely evil; and we have a sect among ourselves that look upon anger in general in the same light. The inference we should draw from their greater strictness and severity in practice is this—that we ought to possess our minds with a strong affection, a fervent zeal, I had almost said with a passion, for our religion. In vain do we boast of the purity of it, either in this or any other respect, if we see ourselves outdone in practice, either by the heathens, or those who hold the truth of it in unrighteousness. That our religion is most fit to inspire a true temper of meekness and humility, and of every other virtue, we cannot doubt; it has been tried in the times of persecution, and, like *gold purified in the fire*, has appeared with greater splendor, and still retained its intrinsic worth. Unworthy are we of the blessing of deliverance from that dreadful state, if a security from danger shall encourage a licentiousness of life: rather let the consideration of that inestimable blessing, as it is a very rational, be a standing and effectual motive in our hearts of the more punctual performance of every duty, now become so practicable and easy.

3dly, Let us endeavour to acquire a greatness of mind. By this I do not mean arrogance, for that bespeaks a little mind, a mind that can reflect on nothing within itself that looks great, except arrogance: but a true greatness of mind arises from a true judgment of things, and

and a noble ascendancy of the soul, inclining us to act above what is barely our duty: it is rising to the sublime in virtue. This will create a reverence for ourselves, and will set us as far above the mean gratification of giving any real occasion of passion to others, as of being susceptible of it when an occasion may be given to us. We see how often children, upon the most frivolous grounds, kindle into fury, and fall into fits and agonies; we see it, but do not think it worth our notice, much less our provocation. And how often do we see men copying this example on occasions altogether as unmomentous? A man of a superior turn of mind pays an equal regard to both; or rather pays a less regard to the latter, in proportion as they make themselves hereby less than children.

One of the ancients said, that he had gained one advantage from philosophy; that it had brought him to wonder at nothing. But it looks as if we, the generality of us, were strangers in the world, we are ever expressing our surprize and wonder at every thing; and this surprize prepares the way for passion. We wonder that we should meet with such a behaviour, such a treatment, such an affront; whereas the greatest wonder is, that we should wonder at it. A man of sound judgment soon takes such a survey of mankind, that he expects many occurrences of that sort. He expects to meet with haughtiness from the proud, contempt from the rich, ill-manners from the vulgar, both great and small; foolish talking and impertinence from the ignorant and conceited: he is prepared to meet with all this, and therefore no way disconcerted when he does. He has reached a very excellent point in wisdom, he has learned to be unconcerned at the follies of mankind; to be unconcerned, because they are follies. With an erect and vigorous, but calm and considerate resolution, he advances in the high-road of virtue; and, like one of the Persian nobles, thinks it beneath his wisdom and dignity to stop short, and turn about to gaze at any thing. He is placed in an upper region, out of the reach of all the

clouds, vapours, and exhalations that infest the atmosphere of the earth. The very suspicion that a man is despised, betrays a consciousness of his own littleness and inferiority; but a man of a truly great mind thinks, and very rationally thinks, every man that despises him below him. He will rise so high, as to do a good office to or bestow a favour on the man that has injured him; as considering his adversary has thereby done himself more injury, and that if he does not by this means overcome him, he will at least make him ashamed of his enmity and opposition.

But, lastly, Nothing can have so prevalent a power to still all the undue agitations of passion, so apt to arise from the various connections we have with the prejudices and passions of others; nothing so fit to induce a smooth and easy flow of temper, as a frequent application to the throne of grace, to beseech him who is *the God of peace, that his peace may rule in our hearts*; that it may be the fixed and predominant principle there. This *presence with the Lord* is a kind of *absence from the body*; an absence from all the vain imaginations, the tumult of the passions, and the sinful thoughts which they suggest. The pure and serene complacency that springs up in the soul by this intercourse with heaven, shews that here she is nearest the centre of her true happiness; where the greatest things of the earth lose all their power of attraction. The awful contemplation of God's greatness, and the sense of our littleness, but too powerfully impressed by the mortifying view of our infirmities, will soon bring us to a conviction that pride, the great source of intemperate passion, was not *made for man*. The due preparation of the heart to wait upon God in this serious and solemn exercise will be of admirable use to remove far from us all malicious, uncharitable, and unbenevolent thoughts. Strange! that these should find a place in our hearts, but for an hour, against those whom we expect to be the associates of our happiness to all eternity.

Now to God the Father, &c.

SERMON CLIV.

By WILLIAM ADAMS, D. D.

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On Examination of a right Faith in Christ.

2 COR. XIII. 5.

Examine yourselves, whether ye are in the faith.

IN stating the advantages of the Christian revelation above those of natural religion, we usually insist, and justly, upon the purity and perfection of its precepts, and on the superior force of those motives by which it engages and enforces our obedience; from both which, taken together, we might expect the most exemplary purity and sanctity of manners to be the prevailing character among Christians. But when we look out for this happy effect we are apt to be filled with wonder and disappointment; and are at a loss to conceive how the lives of Christians can be so little answerable to their professions. For in what are they generally better, or what do they more than others? Are not the lives of Christians a mixture of good and evil like those of other men? Does not the latter generally prevail? Is there not as much impiety, lewdness, riot, and excess of every kind; does not the same love of the world, of its honours, pleasures, and riches, as much rule in the hearts of men, and produce the same overflowings of ungodliness, the same rapine, violence, fraud, and treachery, as was seen in the world before Christianity had a beginning?

This reproach, which is brought upon religion by its pretended friends, we are sure to meet with in the mouth of its enemies, who have with art and malice improved it even into an argument against its truth.

It is obvious to observe, that they who make this objection are usually in the number of those who minister the most occasion for it. And we may with confidence assert, that the best and most virtuous amongst us, if there are any that excel in virtue, that have kept themselves unspotted from the world, and have served the Lord with a perfect heart, will thankfully ascribe the good

whereunto they have already attained, and rest the hopes of persevering, and reaching at last the high prize of their calling, to the grace of God in the lights, assistances, and motives of the gospel.

But the fact itself, as it is here stated, we may hope, is quite otherwise. It is certain that as a rule of life, nothing from heaven can come more perfect, more worthy of God and man, than the Christian institution. And it is plainly impossible that men, who always act from some motive or other, can in any degree believe the obligations of duty, with the promises and terrors annexed to it, without being in some degree the better for it. In fact, when this faith was first offered to the world, when the truths of religion were believed upon examination and conviction, its influence was generally seen and acknowledged.

The first Christian apologists insist openly and in the face of the world on this fact—that, when men became converts to the religion of Christ, their manners, tempers, and dispositions, were changed and reformed; they were, as it were, born again; and became new creatures. And for this we have the authority of enemies as well as friends. One of the most respectable characters among the heathen writers, whose office led him to inquire into their behaviour, reports to the emperor who was then their persecutor, that he found nothing observable among the Christians but their singular charity, piety, and innocence of life. Another, who valued himself upon his proficiency in philosophy and his hatred of Christianity, and who was himself invested with the imperial authority, commends their piety to God, and benevolence to men, to the imitation of those of his own religion; and thought it the best way to keep down the rising credit of Christianity to adopt the customs and rival the charity of Christians, by erecting hospitals, schools, and beneficent foundations, of which they had given the first example to the world. And though the influence of our holy religion may have visibly decreased in the later ages, yet surely there are numerous and shining instances in our own times, of the same piety, charity, temperance, meekness, and every other virtue for which the gospel was at first distinguished.

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If then our Christian faith have lost its influence, may it not be doubted whether this faith is to be every where found where it is pretended or professed? If it produce not the same effects which it did in the first Christian worthies, is it, are we sure, the same faith in kind and degree which theirs was? May it not be doubted whether the faith of many in the gospel-truths be any thing more than a negative suspended assent, inclining to neither, but halting between two opinions; whether it be not a superficial transient principle, floating only on the surface, and that has never taken possession of the mind; or whether it be not directed to objects of little importance in the religious life, in neglect of the weightier truths of the gospel. For true Christian faith is an active principle that delights in exerting itself, that is always victorious, and overcometh the world.

Of this faith then if we see little effects, it is perhaps because we see few instances of it. With many Christians the faith which they profess is certainly a mere self-delusion, a false persuasion that they believe the truths of the gospel, when they have scarce informed themselves what these truths are; and much less have inquired upon what grounds they are to be believed. At best, it is here a thoughtless unmeaning assent, which, as it comes not from the heart, can never influence the heart, or produce any fruit in their lives and conversations. These are Christians merely because they were not born in pagan countries. And may they not still be said to be almost heathens in a Christian country, when they are often strangers to the worship, and have need yet to be taught what are the first principles of the oracles of God?

But secondly, among those who are better taught, and even those who pretend to teach others, how many are there who point their own and the faith of others to objects which serve rather to amuse and dazzle than edify the mind; who take into their faith only the more speculative doctrines of Christianity, or at least consider these as the chief articles of their belief; who spend all their zeal in defining and explaining what revelation hath left unexplained; and in binding their own interpretations of

scripture upon the faith of others? So that if ignorance be one source of corruption among Christians, learning too has often led the way to dangerous and pernicious errors. How often do men lose themselves in searching beyond what is written into the mysteries of Christianity, without ever reflecting that these are mysteries of godliness; revealed, as far as they are revealed, to inflame our piety, our love and gratitude to heaven, for the great things which God and our Redeemer have done for us; to raise higher our detestation of sin, and to establish our virtue upon the purest and noblest principles? What wonder then is it if these powerful motives lose all their influence on our lives, when they are not considered as motives to a holy and virtuous life, and are made to terminate wholly in speculation and refinement.

Often have these speculations led to errors in practice; and a difference in opinion only destroyed that charity, that love of man, which, united with the love of God, is the very soul and spirit of the Christian life. Often is this charity, which we are commanded to extend to our enemies and persecutors, denied, and all the hopes of salvation along with it, to all but those of the same communion and faith with ourselves; while we liberally grant to these every thing that is promised, and much more than is without other conditions promised in the gospel. What think ye of unconditional election, irresistible grace, and finished salvation, as it is called, claimed and assumed on the one hand; and absolute universal reprobation, or endless perdition, announced as the alternative already decreed, on the other?

Yet these are doctrines which, though they unchristian almost the whole Christian world, and leave them without hope under the curse of God, are believed by many sincerely pious, and I therefore hope sincerely good men, who are not aware of the dangerous uses to which the wicked may pervert them, by flattering themselves and others that they are in a state of salvation when guilty of the grossest sins; or that they are inconsistent with the Christian doctrine of repentance, and reduce all the motives of religion, the exhortations, promises, and threatenings of the gospel, if not the

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use and meaning of a future judgment, to nothing.

Thus our belief and practice are set at variance with each other. Our faith is divided against itself; and our belief in some speculative doctrines, subverts in its tendency and consequences all the principles of practical religion.

Let us then consider, in the third place, what are the doctrines which we are most concerned to know and believe; and what it is to believe them aright: *The secret things, saith the scripture, belong unto the Lord our God. (Deut. xxix. 29.)* The ways and dispensations of Providence are locked up from our view in the secret councils of heaven: *But the things which are revealed belong unto us, and to our children for ever, that we should do all the works of this law.* That is, the things which we are concerned to know are the things which are clearly revealed. And the ends or reasons for which they are revealed, and those for which we are required to believe them, are the same; namely, that they may influence our practice, that we may be induced to do all the works of the law; that we may be led to attend to and practise the duties of religion.

Now the things which we are most concerned to know, are certainly the end and destination of man; that life and immortality which it was one great end of our Saviour's coming into the world to bring to light by his gospel, together with the duties and means by which to prepare and fit ourselves for this life and immortality. These, as they are of the highest moment and importance to us, are, as we might expect from the wisdom and goodness of God, revealed in the clearest manner; and we are therefore bound with the fullest assurance to believe. The only conceivable end, and as well the declared design of religion, is to lead men by a life of holiness or sincere obedience here, to happiness hereafter. To this end all its precepts, doctrines, and institutions, manifestly tend. Our Saviour came to call sinners to repentance; to purify to himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works. The scriptures are given to make the man of God perfect, and thoroughly furnished unto all good works; and to teach us that, by patient continuance in

well-doing, we must seek for glory, honour, and immortality.

If then the end of faith is practice, those doctrines are of the first importance in our belief which have the most practical influence on our lives; that *without holiness no man shall see the Lord* (Heb. xii. 14.); that *the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God* (1 Cor. v. 9.); that *if we will enter into life we must keep the commandments* (Matt. xix. 17.); that *the wicked shall go into everlasting punishment, and the righteous into life eternal.* (Matt. xxv. 46.) These are some of the fundamental doctrines of Christianity; than these there are no doctrines of more consequence to engage our attention; none more clearly revealed to command our assent. To hold fast our profession in these without wavering, is one of the first duties of faith. To question or controvert these, to espouse doctrines which enervate or evade the force of them, is to incur the guilt of a more dangerous heresy than that of opposing any of the more speculative doctrines of Christianity.

I mean not to pronounce indiscriminately all those to be heretics who, in their lives or tenets, deny these practical truths; because in the idea which is usually affixed to this character is implied an open profession and attachment to erroneous and dangerous opinions, and a zeal to propagate them in the world: whereas there are few so hardy as to avow their unbelief of the practical doctrines, or those which enforce the moral duties of Christianity. But if there are any who decry the practical precepts or moral duties of the gospel, or depreciate the character of righteousness, holiness, and sanctity, which it holds out to our imitation; whose principles supercede the necessity of good works, of obedience, and a holy life; or who make the life of a sinner consistent with the hopes of the gospel; this is, more or less, in its several degrees, the most dangerous heresy that can be embraced or taught.

Here then we have a rule to judge by, and which the unlearned and ignorant Christian may apply when his faith is in danger of being misled, or when unnecessary fears and scruples arise in his mind, whether he be in the faith. If

we are called to believe in matters of doubtful disputation, their being doubtful and not clearly revealed is itself a presumption that they are not of the first importance to be believed. We may be less solicitous about them; and if our conscience condemn us not for an evil heart of unbelief, may have confidence towards God that we have all the faith that is necessary and essential to salvation. If we are careful to do the will of God, and impartial in our inquiries after truth, we shall know of the doctrine whether it be of God or of man. If they tend in any degree to loosen the obligations of morality, to flatter the sinner into security, or to substitute any thing in the place of real righteousness; we ought to reject them, as contrary to the general tenor of the gospel, and to those truths which are most clearly revealed.

If any passages of scripture, taken separately and by themselves, seem to bear a different aspect, or lead us to question the obligations I have mentioned, our faith in these leading fundamental truths ought not still to be shaken. We must and ought to suspect that the meaning of them is mistaken; and shall assuredly find that, when considered and taken in their whole connection, they will admit and require a very different construction. The word of truth, which is always according to godliness, cannot be at variance with itself. And sooner shall heaven and earth pass away, than one tittle of these plain and awful truths shall fail.

St. Peter hath told us that there are some things in St. Paul's epistles which are hard to be understood, which those that are unlearned and unstable wrest to their own destruction. And we learn from St. James that this apostle's doctrine of justification by faith without works had been miserably mistaken and perverted to a dangerous use even in his time. And if there were those difficulties and dangerous mistakes in the early times of the apostles, when the language in which these epistles were written was generally understood, and the different occasions upon which they were written may be supposed to be better known; how much must these difficulties be increased to the unlearned of the present times? and how

carefully guarded should they be against being misled by such interpretations of doubtful texts of scripture, as are of dangerous or only suspicious tendency?

It remains yet to be considered, in the last place, what the duty of faith in the great articles of religion implies; or when we may be said to believe them aright. I have mentioned, you see, two sorts of reasons for believing the truths of the gospel: the one is, the evidence of these truths themselves, or the natural grounds upon which we believe them; the other is, the moral reason or final cause; the end, design, or the use of believing. The former of these reasons will prevail alike for the belief of all the truths recorded in the scriptures. The latter, derived from the moment and consequences of believing, will make an infinite difference between them. Both these reasons must co-operate in forming a true principle of faith in the believer. The import and intention of the doctrine must be attended to and believed, otherwise there will be no meaning or use in believing.

That our Saviour Christ was born in Bethlehem, and died on Mount Calvary, is as true as that he was the Son of the living God, invested with the divine authority of the Father, and that when he speaks it is the voice of Heaven;—as true as that he hath opened to us the everlasting doors of life and immortality; and that he will raise us up at the last day. But these truths are not equally the objects of our faith; because the first of them are of no use in application; and the latter are the most important of all truths that were ever sounded in the ears of mankind, and the most powerful motives to a holy life. In the former we may be safely and innocently ignorant; but it is a very culpable neglect not to inquire and satisfy ourselves of the truth of the latter; the most dangerous infidelity not to believe them with the whole heart.

The doctrines which are directed to the heart, and are designed to put the active powers of the mind in motion, we must open the heart to receive, and receive with that emotion and impression of mind which they are adapted and intended to produce in us. The truths which are designed to influence our lives

we must not only believe, but adopt as principles of action; to be applied in the whole conduct and government of ourselves. In a word, if we would know whether we believe aright, we must inquire of our actions, of the temper, sentiments, and ruling passions of the mind; whether these correspond with the doctrines we believe. The faith which gives us the name of Christians is one thing; and that which makes us Christians indeed, or true disciples of Christ, is another. He that saith I know him, as the apostle tells us, and by knowing Christ is in the language of scripture the same with believing in him, *he that saith I know or believe in Christ, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar.* (1 John, ii. 4.) In the scripture sense every sinner, whatever be the system of his faith, whatever he believes in word and profession, is an unbeliever. *Hereby, saith our Saviour, shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one for another; if ye keep this which is my peculiar commandment: not if ye call me Lord, and profess your belief in my name, but if ye keep my commandments, and do the will of my Father which is in heaven.* And St. James very justly derides as insignificant, that faith which is unaccompanied by obedience. *Shew me thy faith, saith he, without works; I will shew thee my faith by my works.* (James, ii. 18.)

This then is the surest criterion and mark by which we may judge whether we are in the faith. For assuredly if our lives are corrupt and impure, our faith is also spurious, corrupt, and impure: whatever church we belong to, whatever creed we profess, our faith is vain, we are yet in our sins. Whatever hopes we may build upon the rectitude of our opinions, and our zeal for the truth, our portion will at last be with the hypocrites and unbelievers.

SERMON CLV.

On the sublime Motives and Principles of Christianity.

ACTS, xx. 24.

Neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy.

THIS is a declaration worthy of the faith and piety of an apostle; and which shews the force and power of true

Christian principles, when rooted and cultivated in the mind.

St. Paul was now taking his final leave of the elders or pastors in the church which he had planted at Ephesus. And there is a peculiar propriety in the words of the text and those which follow, when we consider them as addressed to his fellow labourers in the ministry of the gospel; whom he seems here by his example indirectly to forewarn of the dangers to which their situation exposed them, and of the consequent duties expected from them. *And now behold, saith he, I go bound in the spirit unto Jerusalem, not knowing the things which shall befall me there; save that the Holy Ghost witnesseth in every city, that bonds and afflictions abide me. But none of these things move me; neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I may finish my course with joy, and the ministry which I received of the Lord Jesus Christ, to testify the gospel of the grace of God.*

But the principles upon which this declaration of the apostle is founded, are such as are common to all true Christians; and the duties resulting from them are such as are bound upon Christians in general. Disinterestedness, magnanimity, and true fortitude, whether in resisting temptations, in facing dangers, or supporting afflictions, are, like all the other virtues, carried to the highest pitch in the Christian system of morals; and are more adequately supported by the articles of the Christian creed than by the best arguments drawn from reason or the sublimest philosophy.

I shall therefore, in recommending the apostle's example to your imitation, inquire,

First, What those principles were which dictated the generous declaration in the text, and which supported our apostle with joy, through life and through death itself, in a conduct consonant thereto.

And shall, secondly, endeavour to shew that these principles and a deportment suitable to them, are implied in the profession and character of every true Christian.

And shall, lastly, apply the whole to the use and instruction of common Christians, in such reflections as may arise from the subject.

First, then, The thing imported in this declaration of the apostle is plainly a

steady resolution to discharge his duty in all circumstances; an entire devotement of himself, of all his cares, interests, and fortunes, to the service of God; and a total resignation to his will under all the trials and afflictions that might befall him. This is the character assumed in the text. And how far St. Paul had a right to take it to himself, we learn from the history of his Christian life; in which we find an ardour and force of mind superior to all the temptations of ease and indolence, and surmounting all the difficulties and opposition to which the most hazardous situation and obnoxious enterprise could expose him.

Engaged in the greatest and most arduous undertaking which could be put into the heart of man, that of changing the religion of all nations, turning the heathens from dumb idols to serve the living God, and bringing them to acknowledge a crucified teacher for their Lord and Saviour; he had every difficulty and every danger to encounter; had all the powers of the world armed against him; all the passions and prejudices of mankind to contend with; all the evils that bigotry, pride, and persecution could inflict, awaiting him. Yet none of these things moved or discouraged him. We see him carrying this unwelcome doctrine into all parts of the world; traversing distant countries; sailing through storms and tempests, without rest and without weariness; planting churches in Italy, Greece, and Asia; and, in a word, establishing true religion every where, and bringing whole nations to the obedience of faith.

What then were the principles which could inspire an attempt so perilous, and in all human prospects so desperate as this; and which supplied such invincible courage and fortitude in the execution of it? These could be no other than a pious trust and confidence in the goodness of God, an assurance of the truth of his promises, and a joyful hope of his reward in another life. *I know*, saith he, *that this shall turn to my salvation—according to my earnest expectation and my hope, that in nothing I shall be ashamed or disappointed; but that with all boldness, as always, so now also, Christ shall be magnified in my body, whether it be by life or by death. For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.* (Phil. i. 20, 21.)

The miraculous call of St. Paul to the

ministry of the gospel, carried with it such conviction of its truth as was indeed irresistible. The abundance of the revelations with which he was afterwards favoured from heaven, make it no wonder that his whole mind and soul should be possessed with the ideas of religion, the thoughts of another life, and a sense of the vanity and emptiness of this. And how strongly impressed these sentiments were on his mind, his writings sufficiently declare; which breathe a spirit above mortality, and a faith anticipating the joys of heaven. *I am crucified*, saith he, *with Christ, nevertheless I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.* (Gal. ii. 20.)

Another leading principle in the conduct of our apostle, and which in the Christian system is inseparable from the former, was the love of Christ; and consequently of his service. St. Paul, though a chosen vessel to the Lord, had opposed his religion and persecuted his church. He had much forgiven him, and therefore he loved much. The love of Christ constrained him. This principle made the most rigorous duties a pleasure; overruled the feelings and apprehensions of nature; and taught him to rejoice in tribulation, and to be counted worthy to suffer shame for the name of Christ. *In all things*, says he, *approving ourselves as the ministers of Christ; in much patience, in afflictions, in necessities, in distresses, in stripes, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labours, in watchings, in fastings; by honour and dishonour; by evil report and good report; as deceivers and yet true; as dying and behold we live; as sorrowful yet always rejoicing; as poor yet making many rich; as having nothing and yet possessing all things.* (2 Cor. vi. 4—7.)

Hear with what triumph and joy he exults in the force of this victorious principle: *Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or the sword? In all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height nor depth—nothing in the compass of space or the reach of time—shall be able to separate us from the love of God which*

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is in Christ Jesus. (Rom. viii. 35. 37, 38, 39.)

How far these principles, and the duties resulting from them, are necessary to, and expected in all Christians in general, I come in the next place to inquire.

Here then it is obvious to observe, that a love of God in Christ, a belief and trust in his promises, and an absolute reliance on his word and truth, are all of them implied in the faith of a Christian; in that faith which makes us Christians; and resolve at last into this one principle. We cannot believe in God without believing that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him. We cannot believe in Christ without hope and trust in that life and immortality which he hath brought to light by his gospel. These are the first principles of the oracles of God; the first elements of the Christian faith; and in which those who are babes in Christ are supposed to be rooted and grounded. Again, this faith naturally worketh by love. We cannot believe in Christ, in the great things which God hath done and Christ hath suffered for our redemption, without the highest love and veneration for his name; without dedicating every generous affection of the heart to his service. Thus the principles which animated our holy apostle are all summed up and implied in faith; in that faith which is professed by every Christian, and which is essential to this name and character.

And it is as certain that an absolute unlimited obedience to the divine commandments, a perfect submission of our will in all things to the will and law of God, an unshaken allegiance to heaven in all circumstances of life and death itself, are duties incumbent upon all Christians.

But are all apostles? are all workers of miracles? have all the gift of intrepidity, the patience and courage of martyrs? I answer, that all are not called to this fiery trial; but it is the duty of all to be prepared to follow where the voice of God and conscience calls them. We are commanded to give up all to our duty; to part with houses and lands, with wife and children, for Christ's sake and the gospel's (Matt. xix. 29.); to cut off a right hand, and pluck out a right eye, (v. 29.) if they prove the occasion of offence, or interfere with a present duty.

In a word we must deny ourselves every gratification, and sacrifice our dearest interests, when they stand in competition with our duty. This is indeed the only proof we can give of our virtue, and in all cases the standard and measure of it. As much as there is of this resignation to the will of God, of this fidelity to heaven and to our duty, exemplified in our actions, so much is there, and only so much, of virtue in them.

This then is in general the duty expected from the rule of practice to all Christians; that they pay an universal unreserved obedience to all the commands of God. If different degrees of virtue are expected from Christians in different situations and circumstances, our obedience must however, as far as it is tried, answer to this test. If some are called, for the high purposes of Providence, to the severest trials, to give glory to God and to do honour to his religion; if, like our Lord himself and his apostles and martyrs, they are made perfect through sufferings; if their virtue comes out like gold from the furnace of adversity; these shall be great in the kingdom of heaven. *Him that overcometh, saith our Saviour, will I make a pillar in the temple of my God: and I will confess his name before my Father and before his angels.* (Rev. iii. 5-12.)

They whose virtue is assaulted by fewer temptations, if they hold fast their integrity, and walk in the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless; if their faith is unshaken, and resolved against farther trials; may purchase to themselves a good degree of confidence towards God, though they have not yet resisted unto blood, nor given the last proof of their faith and obedience. But he that is weakest in the faith, whose trust and faith in God are unequal to the higher conflicts of temptation; though his virtue be accepted, will doubtless be the least in the kingdom of heaven. In our Father's house are many mansions; and according to our different improvements in virtue and goodness here, will different honours and degrees of happiness be assigned us hereafter.

Those who are called to the highest achievements in virtuous action, are, we may presume to suppose, favoured with more talents of grace and strength to enable them for the warfare. And we are also assured that God will impart still farther

ther aids of his spirit to those who want and faithfully ask it. But the scriptures, which call upon all to be perfect, as far as according to their proportion and the measures of humanity they can be, inculcate every where these higher duties as befitting all Christians in general, and as alone worthy of the Christian name and character; and seem to suppose the ordinary gifts of the spirit, vouchsafed alike to all Christians in the revelation of the gospel, sufficient to qualify them for very high attainments in virtue. *If any man will be my disciple, faith our blessed Saviour, let him take up his cross and follow me. Who so loveth father or mother more than me, is not worthy of me. My brethren, faith St. Peter, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some new thing happened unto you; but rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy. (1 Pet. iv. 12.) For even hereunto, faith St. Peter, were ye called: for Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example that ye might follow his steps. (1 Pet. ii. 21.)*

Indeed what is there to which the faith of a Christian, when improved and made habitual to the mind, is not equal? To what high degrees of vigour and efficacy may we not raise this principle by a frequent contemplation of the great objects of it: God, infinitely powerful, wise, and good; Christ, the redeemer, and saviour, and friend; and a life of infinite duration in another state, in which we shall be advancing in knowledge, virtue, and happiness, without end. What force and energy will it not give to all the powers of the mind, when our faith assures us that God will stand by us and save us, and the light of his countenance shine upon us; when our reason and conscience applaud us; when our interest, our ambition, our hopes and our fears, conspire in leading us to the same pursuits; and have all of them an object of infinite importance before them. Why indeed should we think it strange as if some new thing happened to us, to be called to any labours or sufferings in the service of God, and our own eternal interests; when we see men every day, from the slightest motives of worldly honour and ambition, even court dangers and difficulties, and brave death itself in its most terrible forms?

Do we really believe that we have immortal souls, destined to a life of happiness or misery without end? and can we shrink at the fiercest dangers that intercept us in our way, or be turned aside by the foolish pleasures that would beguile us of our reward? Do we indeed believe that these light afflictions and self-denial, which endure for a moment, work for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, and can we be weary or faint in our minds? Shall we fear to encounter any difficulties, or doubt to sacrifice our most darling inclinations to his pleasure, in whose favour is life eternal, and at whose right hand there are pleasures for evermore? Can we reflect on the love of Christ which led him through a painful, laborious, and friendless life; despising the shame and enduring the cross for our sakes; and do not our hearts burn within us? Do we not feel a generous ardour and impatience to shew ourselves worthy of his name? Shall we not count it all joy when we fall into temptations, to prove our fidelity in following the Captain of our salvation, and to please him who hath called us to be his soldiers?

Thus our Christian faith is more than sufficient to support us under all trials. *In all things, faith the apostle, we are more than conquerors, through Christ that loved us.* This then is the victory that overcometh the world, the principle that is superior to all its temptations, its allurements, its terrors; even our faith.

But I hasten to apply what has been said to our use and instruction, in such reflections as offer themselves from the subject. If this principle be thus all-powerful, and sufficient in every exigence for the highest degrees of virtue, whence is it that its influence is so little seen on the lives of Christians? The answer is, because they are weak in the faith. They submit to the light of evidence, and readily assent to all the truths of the gospel, while nothing more is required than this consent of the mind, and a formal profession of this belief. But when for a trial of their faith they are called to sacrifice their ease, or pleasure, or interest; when temptations and difficulties arise, by and by they are offended. Speculative opinions, however well grounded, and even warmly espoused, are found often to have little effect as principles of action.

Good

Good principles are no more than good seed, which requires care and culture, and the attention and vigilance of the husbandman, to bring forth its proper fruit.

What then is the care and culture required in the present case; or by what means may we best strengthen our faith, and increase the force of the virtuous principle within us? I answer, consideration and reflection, the frequent renewing our good resolutions, and the exercises of piety and religion.

It is certain that if we retire into ourselves, and consult our reason, whether to prefer the things temporal, or the things eternal, we shall instantly find a light from heaven shining round about us, which, though not so sensible and alarming as that of St. Paul at his conversion, will yet dart irresistible conviction into the mind, and awaken all the powers of the soul into action. This then is the great secret in the religious life, to transfer the convictions of the mind to the heart. We must dwell on the grounds of our faith, and the infinite moment and importance of the great truths it presents to us, till it has caught hold of the affections, and becomes the ruling principle in the heart. We must allot some portion of our time to impress these awful thoughts on our minds; and shall find no portion of our time so worthily or more pleasingly spent. We must habituate ourselves to the service of God by the exercises of religion, and by a constant attendance on his word and ordinances; which have a natural tendency to spiritualize our affections, and to direct them to things above. We must every day renew the dedication of ourselves to God and virtue; resigning all our cares and interests into his hands; and committing our souls unto him in well doing, as unto a faithful Creator. When we have attained to this resignation of ourselves to his will, and have learned to refer every thing to God, we shall not only finish, but run the whole of our course with joy. We shall find infinite pleasure and delight in the most rigorous acts of our duty. And if we are not called to the sharpest trials of our faith, shall yet be prepared for them; and may be as well accepted of God, if we have raised as high the force and vigour of the virtuous principle in the hidden man of the

heart. By referring every thing to God, we shall enhance the virtue of our good actions; shall give virtue to the most indifferent; and derive a rational satisfaction to our consciences from the minutest and easiest parts of duty. Not the least of our good deeds, when arising from this principle, will fall to the ground, or be forgotten by our Father who is in heaven. A cup of cold water given for his sake will not lose its reward.

Let this then be our care, as the great thing needful, to root the principles of our faith firmly in the mind; to recal frequently to our view the momentous truths it imports; by constant reflection and the exercises of religion to keep them always awake and active in our breasts. So shall we with patience and cheerfulness run the race that is set before us, and finish our course with joy; and may at last take to ourselves that happy triumph of our apostle, *I have fought a good fight; I have finished my course; I have kept the faith: henceforth is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which God the righteous judge shall give me in that day.*

SERMON CLVI.

On Preparation for Death.

2 KINGS, xx. i.

Set thine house in order, for thou shalt die, and not live.

THESE words are a message which God sent by his prophet to king Hezekiah; the occasion of which is so well known that I shall not need to enlarge upon it. My design is to call upon you to apply the admonition of the text every one to his own person; for we have all the same interest in it which this king of Judah had. We want not a prophet to foretel that we shall die. We have the fullest conviction, and a sort of ocular demonstration of this in the make and frame of our own bodies; in the natural progress of all animal beings from maturity to decay, and in the generations that are fleeting away in succession before our eyes. But surely no sagacity could ever foresee the general inattention paid to this truth; that an event so certain and important, so decisive of all our interests, should be so generally overlooked in our designs and dispositions through life.

life. It is certainly, of all things that concern us, the most necessary to attend to this. But what can be said to excite attention to truths so known and familiar, that no one ever doubted of them? Who wants to be told that the rising sun will set; *that all flesh is as grass, and all the goodliness thereof as the flower of the field*? Who can bear to be taught with an air of wisdom what every one has already learned? Certainly so. But if however this be true, we must take for truth all the consequences that attend it. We may see and acknowledge a fact, and shut our eyes to the truths that are connected with it. We may assent to a general truth, without inquiring what personal concern we have in it; how far our interests are affected by it; and without making it a principle of action or conduct. Now, though the truths I am speaking of are universally known, yet that men pay little attention to them in their practice, and are too little concerned about their consequences, I am sure many of us want to be told. The living know that they shall die. But it is a fact as certain, that many live as if their inward thought was that they should continue for ever, and their abiding from generation to generation.

To prevent this fatal inadvertence, this inconsistency in our character and conduct, I shall endeavour to shew the necessity above all things of attending to this great truth, and of making it a leading principle in our lives and actions: and, secondly, to shew its force as a motive for setting not only our temporal affairs but our consciences and our spiritual accounts in order, agreeably to the admonition in the text.

And that we may, together with the folly and danger of not attending to this principle, see the better how to guard against this inattention, it will perhaps be of use to inquire into the causes and circumstances, which chiefly contribute to it.

Now one probable reason why this matter is observed with so little attention is, I think, its being familiar and habitual to us. This truth was never new to us. We learned it before we were capable of reasoning or reflecting upon it. It has ever wanted the force of novelty and surprize to attract our attention; and therefore the impressions it makes on us,

unless quickened by reflection or some accidents which point its force more directly towards us, are but faint and languid. Our inattention itself grows by time into a habit, and becomes in some sort natural to us; just as the marvellous works of creation having been always before our eyes excite no curiosity; and we often pass through life without reflecting on the infinite power and skill which appear in every part of them. This world of wonders, which fills the contemplative mind with rapture and astonishment, is no spectacle of admiration or praise to the multitude, who see the year return, day and night, summer and winter, seed-time and harvest, succeed each other, without lifting up their hands or their thoughts to heaven, and without reading any footsteps of the eternal power and godhead in his works.

Were this event which we are contemplating unknown and unheard of, and the sentence in the text on a sudden pronounced upon us, *thou shalt die, and not live*; it is easy to conceive with what consternation it would seize us: but we are not at all less concerned in this event, nor is it at all less certain than if it was this instant made known to us by a voice from heaven. If then this truth be the same, and all its consequences will as certainly follow, why should we not act upon it with the same steadiness, zeal, and assiduity, as we should if we were instantly called upon from heaven to do it. If, in proportion as these objects are thought distant, they lose their power of affecting us, we must supply this defect by our own care and application. As our imagination grows indolent and unapt to be moved through custom and habitude, we must call up our reason to represent the greatness and importance of the subject, which, when well presented to the mind, will not fail to raise and engage its attention.

A second cause which averts our attention in this case is, that the subject itself is unpleasing and painful. The pains of death, the skeleton, and the grave, are disagreeable images to present to the mind; and the thought of returning to dust, of being soon lost and forgotten, very mortifying to the pride of man. But these owe, in great part, their terrors to the imagination only, which a little reason and reflection will effectually dissipate.

diffipate. The last moments of life are usually those in which we suffer least: and if sickness and sorrow do not sooner reconcile us, the decrepitude and miseries of age are more than enough to contrast with all the horrors of death.

But, alas! this is not thinking of death as Christians or as men. Were every thing to end with this life, there would be nothing in death or even in life that would deserve much thought or attention. But reason and revelation assure us that death is only the entrance into another life; a life which shall never have an end, and in which we shall be for ever happy or miserable according to our lives and conduct here; that it is appointed unto men once to die, but after that the judgment; that God will judge every man according to the works done in the body; that there is no wisdom, knowledge, or device in the grave, whither we are going; but as death leaves us, judgment will find us: it is this which gives all its importance to life itself, and makes death the most interesting period in our whole existence. It is the stroke which decides our fate for ever; which finishes our character, and terminates our hopes; which leaves us no farther room for repentance or amendment, or for purchasing to ourselves a better degree in the kingdom of heaven.

This is to die; to give in our account of the talents with which we have been intrusted; and to take our final allotment, either with the good and faithful servants of God, or with the wicked and slothful. In this view death is indeed the king of terrors to the thoughtless and profligate; to that evil servant who shall say in his heart, *My Lord delayeth his coming; and shall begin to smite his fellow-servants, and to eat and drink with the drunken. Verily, I say unto you, the Lord of that servant shall come in a day when he looketh not for him, and at an hour when he is not aware, and shall cut him asunder, and shall appoint him his portion where there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.*

How much then does it import us to have this object frequently in our thoughts, and to form and fashion every part of our lives with a view to it: that we may be able to give up our accounts with joy and not with grief; that we may be always prepared as men that

wait for their Lord! *Blessed shall that servant be whom his Lord, when he cometh, shall find so doing. Verily, I say unto you, he shall make him ruler over all his goods. Therefore be ye also ready; for in an hour when ye think not the Son of Man cometh.*

A third cause which concurs with more force than any of the former, in producing the effect before us, is the early and strong attachment which we contract to the things of the world. The busy scene in which we live naturally takes up our thoughts and attention; and it is with difficulty that they are called off to the contemplation of truths that are speculative, and which we consider as standing at a distance from us. The senses, imagination, and passions, are perpetually crowding the mind with objects of their own; and amidst the noise and tumult of these, the still voice of reason is not easily heard. The objects they present to us are near at hand, and have the advantage of making a livelier impression upon us; and promising immediate pleasure and satisfaction, rob us of all inclination as well as leisure to attend to objects that are more remote and spiritual. The wants of the body and the provisions of the animal life employ many of our active powers; the lust of the eye, and the pride of life, extend our wishes and pursuits much farther; and where men are less engaged in the cares and business of life, amusement and pleasure are often found as powerful avocations from thought and reflection. This attachment to the world begins as early as life itself; and when it is not restrained by education, for which it is often too powerful, grows every day stronger; till by custom it becomes habitual, and gains the possession of the whole mind. Hence it is, that men of the greatest abstraction of thought, and who have a serious sense of religion upon their minds, often find it difficult to collect their thoughts, and to keep them fixed for any time on spiritual objects. And in others the passions and affections are so absolutely engrossed, and the powers of the mind as it were exhausted, by the concerns of this world, that they become incapable of joining in the common acts of prayer and devotion; and even at the end of a long life, and on the very verge of eternity, are some-

times

times unable to raise their thoughts and affections to heaven, or to disengage them from temporal affairs. This I am certain is sometimes the case, even in men of no abandoned character. So dangerous is the habit of inattention to our duty, and of sloth and negligence in our spiritual concerns.

But if reason is given us to be our guide through life; if it is this which makes us men; how unlike to men, how unworthy of our character, is it to live wholly by appetite, sense, and passion! And how should we employ this faculty of man but in the true business, the end and destination of man? A little attention to this subject will shew us the necessity of attending still farther. And we cannot long attend to it without seeing the folly of attending so much to any thing else. The glittering scenes which captivate our senses and imagination will soon be found to be illusion and deceit. The honours and pleasures of life will fade away and vanish into nothing, when we hold up eternity to our view. Thus the thought of our latter end, if we will but give it at first a fair entertainment in the mind, will soon secure itself a good possession there; and will break the force of that enchantment by which the god of this world hath blinded our eyes that we should not see.

We have in the history of the Maccabees a striking picture of human greatness, carried perhaps to the highest pitch that fortune, honour, power, and pleasure, have ever raised it. *It came to pass, that after Alexander, the son of Philip the Macedonian, who came out of the land of Chittim, had smitten Darius, king of the Persians and Medes, that he reigned in his stead, the first over Greece; and made many wars, and won many strong holds, and slew the kings of the earth; and went through to the ends of the earth, and took spoils of many nations; in so much that the earth was quiet before him. Whereupon he was exalted, and his heart was lifted up. And he gathered a mighty strong host, and ruled over countries and nations and kings, who became tributaries unto him. And after these things he fell sick, and perceived that he should die.*

This is the sum of the proud account at last. He perceived that he should die. What now were the reflections of this mighty conqueror, this pretended son of

Ammon, at this interesting period? After making the earth desolate, and turning it upside down, of what avail were his numerous diadems, his pageant trophies and titles, and all the honours, divine and human, which he had acquired? Would you know the end of these men, the votaries of pride, ambition, and pleasure, and what their thoughts are at the last? it is well described in the book of Wisdom: *Surely we have erred from the way of truth, the light of righteousness hath not shined unto us, and the sun of righteousness rose not upon us; we wearied ourselves in the way of wickedness and destruction; yea we have gone through deserts where there lay no way; but as for the way of the Lord, we have not known it. What hath pride profited us; and what good hath riches with our vaunting brought us? All these things are passed away like a shadow, and as a post that hasteth by; and as a ship that passeth over the waves of the water, which, when it is gone by, the trace thereof cannot be found, neither the path-way of the keel in the waves; or like as when an arrow is shot at a mark, it parteth the air, which immediately cometh together again, so that one cannot know where it went through: even so we, in like manner, as soon as we were born, began to draw to our end, and had no sign of virtue to shew, but were consumed in our own wickedness. For the hope of the ungodly is like dust that is blown away with the wind; like a thin froth that is driven away by the storm; like as the smoke which is driven here and there with a tempest, and passeth away as the remembrance of a guest that tarrieth but a day. But the righteous liveth for evermore, his reward also is with the Lord, and the care of him with the Most High. Therefore shall he receive a glorious kingdom, and a beautiful crown from the Lord's hand; for with his right hand shall he cover him, and with his arm shall he protect him. This is he whom we had some time in derision, and a proverb of reproach. We fools counted his life madness, and his end to be without honour. How is he numbered among the children of God, and his lot is among the saints!*

If then this be the different end of good and bad men, if this alternative be certain and unavoidable, what can be said farther to aggravate the folly and danger of not attending to it? You believe that you are formed for eternity,

that life and death eternal are set before you, that death will consign you to one of these states unalterably, and can you suffer any rest in your souls till you have chosen and secured the better part? Can we be free from care and anxiety, where all our hopes, our highest expectations are at stake? Can we see without horror the danger of perishing for ever; we that are so apprehensive and alarmed at every little incident that threatens our temporal interest, our fortune, or our honour? We can bear with patience the severest discipline, and submit to the most painful operations where our health is in danger; but think every thing a trouble and a sore burden, every moment too much to spare from our pleasure or repose, when our eternal salvation is at stake. Were we assured that in a few years we should be deprived of all our present possessions, and should yet survive the loss of them for a much longer period of time; how careful should we be to provide in the years of plenty for those of famine; and how inexcusable should we think the prodigal that wasted those stores which he might lay up, sleeping in ease and security, without reflecting on the years which he must spend in want and misery? Yet how inadequately does this represent the infatuation of those who pass their days secure and undisturbed, without molesting themselves with the inquiry what part they are to have in the eternity to come; that eternity to which this life, however protracted with all its pleasures, pomps, and vanities, is in proportion literally nothing? Certainly if any thing can awaken us into sense and reason, one but transient view of this dreadful precipice before us must do it.

But this dreadful precipice is not in view before us; we are yet at a safe distance, and may provide against the danger before we approach it. This I might have mentioned as another illusion, which flatters us in our security, and prevents us from attending to our spiritual interests. But what is this life which stands betwixt us and eternity? How many years or days of it can we call our own? Do we want to be told of the uncertain tenure by which we hold it? How many are gone before us who entered upon the year that is past as full of life and hope as ourselves? And which of us can be sure that this night his soul

shall not be required of him? If then the sentence of the text, and the judgment of God, every moment hang over us, why should we be a moment unprepared? Why should we not instantly apply to the duty inculcated in the text? *Set thine house in order; set thy conscience in order; for thou shalt die, and not live.*

In what this duty consists I need not take time to explain. It is not ignorance of our duty, but inattention to it, which is the great evil of life. To set our temporal affairs in order is a lesson which every wise man will draw to himself from this admonition of the prophet. To settle our spiritual concerns, we must examine impartially our consciences, and turn over the register of our past lives with a view to correct every thing that is amiss, and to supply every thing that is defective in our religious character. We must guard ourselves with new resolutions and new rules against those snares and temptations which have at any time betrayed us into sin. We must put ourselves in such a course of life as may best lead us on in the practice and confirm us in the habits of every virtue. And when can we more seasonably apply to these duties than when we are reminded by the revolution of the year, of the quick advances we are making towards our latter end; and are thus powerfully warned by numbering our days to apply our hearts unto wisdom.

When we count over another year in the stage of life, it is natural to pause and review the scenes that we have gone through; to recollect the good and bad that has befallen us in it; the changes that time hath made in our affairs, our persons, and in the world about us; and the marks of gradual decay which age is perhaps bringing upon us. This then is a proper time to look into the state of our minds, and to inquire whether we have made that use of our time for which it was given us. When we reflect how swiftly the years that are gone over us have past, we shall learn to estimate aright the shortness of human life, and to improve the little remainder that is perhaps left us to the best purposes. When we consider the emptiness of all earthly enjoyments, how little we are the better for any honours that we have acquired, any pleasures that we have enjoyed; we shall learn to value aright the pleasures

pleasures that are before us. We shall say with Solomon, *all that cometh is vanity*. We shall look farther for our true happiness, and endeavour to provide for it by a life of piety and virtue. All that is left to us of our past life, all that we can now enjoy or place to our account, is the good that we have done in it. Every thing else is lost, or worse than lost, remembered only by the impressions of guilt, the stain and sting which sin has left behind it. This then will teach us to employ the remainder of our time so as to enjoy it, so as to make it indeed our own, so as that it may never be lost, but be of eternal benefit to us. When we reflect on the numbers that every year hath swept away of our friends and acquaintances, and find it almost a wonder that we are still left to survive them; this uncertainty of our abode here will lead us naturally to ask ourselves, how are we prepared to enter into another life? Had it been our lot to have been called before, could we have met death with cheerfulness, with a comfortable hope that we should be able to stand in the judgment, or should we fatally have been surprised in an evil hour, in an hour when we looked not for it, and with the guilt of many unrepented sins upon us? This then should teach us to make haste, and flee from the wrath to come, not to rest till we have reformed our lives, and secured a good hope in the future life.

Let this day then be the date of your new resolutions, your new counsels, your new life. And let me press it earnestly upon you, as an important duty; not only to improve every particular opportunity of communing with your own hearts, but to allot regularly some portion of time for this purpose; for reviewing the past, and looking forward to the future. This will keep your attention to every other duty awake; you will thus be armed against all temptation; and, in the language of the gospel, will have your loins girded about, and your lights burning, like men that wait for their Lord. And *blessed shall that servant be, whom his Lord, when he cometh, shall find thus watching*.

And thus, by the grace of God, we may be enabled to stand in the judgment, and to receive the crown of life.

SERMON CLVII.

On the Attainment of eternal Life.

MARK, x. 17.

Good Master, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?

AMONG the several inquiries which interest the human mind, there are some of universal importance, in which our whole kind, and every individual is alike concerned. Such are those respecting the nature, end, and destination of man; in what his happiness consist, and how it is to be procured; who gave us our being, and in what that being consists; whether it be to end with this short life, or whether, when our bodies are resolved into dust, our souls shall still survive, and have any part in the eternity to come; whether we are left here to follow our own imaginations, or are accountable for our behaviour to that Power which gave us our being, and will reward or punish us according to our deserts.

To these great points, which concern, as I said, every man that is born into the world, one might expect an universal attention; and that all should be solicitous and earnest to know the truth in these great articles, and to form their whole conduct by them. But when we look into the world about us, we see little of these appearances; and find men, for the greater part, far more engaged, if not wholly occupied, in pursuits of a different kind. If peradventure they have heard with their ears, or been taught in their infancy, the answers which religion makes to these inquiries, these have left little impression behind them, have gained no settled place in their thoughts; and of consequence their lives and actions are little influenced by them. So it certainly is, that many who profess to believe these truths, are little the better for this belief.

To call up your attention then to the question in the text, to awaken a sense of the moment and importance of it, is my present design from the words before us. And the best way to do this will, I think, be to present it naked, in all its plainness and simplicity, before you.

The great truths of religion have a dignity and splendour in them, to which nothing

nothing can be added by argument or eloquence. They require only our attention. We have only to open our eyes to see, and our hearts to feel, and they carry a lustre and conviction that is irresistible along with them.

To see the importance of the inquiry before us, we need only consider the import of the terms themselves, and the nature and evidence of those first truths that are supposed and implied in it; which lead directly to this inquiry, and are the grounds and reasons upon which it is founded.

That there is an eternity to come; that it is not possible in the nature of things for time itself ever to have an end, is what you will easily represent to your own thoughts. If you suppose millions of ages to run out, you will not come to the end of time; you may still count on millions more without end. You cannot, even in thought or imagination, set bounds to it. Now this discernment itself, the power of seeing this great truth in so clear a light, is some sort of presumption that we are formed for eternity. It seems not probable that God would place this great object so strongly in view before us only to engage our curiosity, or unless we had ourselves some interest in it. But of this we have farther very strong intimations from conscience, and the natural apprehensions of men about futurity and a judgment to come. We find in ourselves a sense of good and evil, the fullest sense and conviction that we deserve praise and reward for the one, and blame and punishment for the other.

Our hopes and fears run before us into the other world. We cannot bound our desires and wishes within the narrow circuit of this life; nor can the guilty sinner, in the most prosperous circumstances, shake off the horrors of the next. These presages of futurity have led men in all ages to believe a future state, and surely with reason: for can we suppose them implanted in us for nothing? can we believe that conscience was given us to impress the mind with fear and terror, where no fear is? Is there any other passion or affection which thus deceives us; which is given us in vain, and which has not its proper use and object?

This argument, from the nature of man, will appear yet stronger from the

nature of God. If there be a God, he must be a rewarder of them that diligently seek him. But do we see virtue rewarded in this life? do not vice and wickedness often triumph over it? It is therefore a clear deduction from reason, that there must be a state after this, in which that virtue, which is tried and proved by sufferings here, shall be rewarded, and prosperous vice be punished.

But this truth is in the gospel laid open and naked to our view: life and immortality are there clearly brought to light. We are plainly assured that God hath appointed a day in which he will judge the world in righteousness, and render to every man according to his works. The wicked shall go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into life eternal.

Thus are the previous truths which lead to this inquiry supported by the first principles of natural and revealed religion, as well as attested by the voice of conscience, and the general consent of all ages and nations of the world.

If this then be the truth; if God hath created man immortal, and made him an image of his own eternity; if all, who, by patient continuance in well-doing, seek for glory, and honour, and immortality, shall inherit eternal life; if indignation and wrath are threatened hereafter to those who obey not the truth, but obey unrighteousness; tribulation and anguish to every soul of man that doeth evil: what more can be said to quicken your attention to the inquiry in the text? If good and evil, if life and death eternal are set before you, what can I say to determine your choice? Shall I try to convince you that eternal life and happiness are worth inquiring after; that this life is but for a moment; that it passeth away as a shadow, and bears no proportion to eternity; that we shall be infinite losers if we gain every thing in this world, and forfeit our hopes, and lose our souls for ever; that the greatest afflictions, which endure for a moment, are but light when compared with an eternal weight of glory? Would it not be affronting to the meanest understanding, to suppose it capable of doubting in a case so clear and evident?

Either prove to yourselves that there is indeed nothing beyond the present life; that you are no better than the beasts

beasts that perish; satisfy yourselves that the fears of conscience are vain and chimerical; that all futurity in another state is a mere dream and illusion; that the sense of mankind in this great article is nonsense and folly; or else acknowledge that the inquiry in the text is the most important, is, in comparison, the only important question that can come before you. If the doctrine of a life after this be true, this is certainly the greatest truth in the world. It is this truth which should govern our opinions, sentiments, and judgments of every thing else. And if men are careless and indifferent about their actions, and the consequences attending them, it must be because they have never considered this truth as they ought; have never given it that entertainment in the mind which its supreme importance deserves. And this is certainly the case of the generality of those who call themselves Christians.

To inquire into the reasons of this strange infatuation would lead us into too large a field at present. There is a fool-hardiness in some, proceeding from mere animal strength and a luxuriance of spirits, who seem to pride themselves in this levity of temper; as if it implied fear and cowardice to have any concern for another world, or were a condescension below them to inquire into, or join in the same opinions with the vulgar. These we will grant may, some few of them, have discernment enough to perceive a degree of weakness and credulity in many of those who profess religion; their devotion often tinged with enthusiasm, or corrupted by superstition. But does it follow, that because some are guilty of weakness and error in the worship of God, there is therefore no God, or no worship to be paid to him? If men place too much of their religion in form, or ceremony, or opinion, must we therefore give up the weightier matters of the law? is there therefore no righteousness, mercy, or truth? is there therefore no religion at all, no future state, or a judgment to come? Now this is all that I am at present challenging your attention to. Admit but these great articles of religion, and allow them their proper weight and force, and then pursue your inquiries where reason and conscience direct you. If you can find any religion more likely to recommend you to the favour of God

than the Christian, be that your religion. But if you can find none more pure in its morals, more rational in its doctrines and worship, adhere to the Christian: but adhere to it in earnest, and regard its doctrines and laws as the words of eternal life. At least do not pass through life without thought or reflection, till you have convinced yourselves that there is nothing worth thinking or reflecting about. But neither is this the question, whether there be any thing worth thinking about, but whether there is not every thing that can deserve your attention; whether there is not an object before you, the greatest that can possibly be thought of, or conceived.

Another cause of this supine inattention which I am complaining of, and which cannot too often be laid before you, is the power which present and temporal things have of engrossing our attention, and excluding all other objects from our thoughts.

The things that are temporal are seen; are the objects of our senses, and force our attention; while the things that are eternal are remote in expectation, unknown to our senses, not to be pointed out or made objects to the imagination; and are therefore unapt to move or engage the affections, and to set the active powers of the mind in motion. Hence, as I said, we see the world about us taken up with the present scene, busy and careful about many things, but in seeming ignorance or forgetfulness of any better part, of any thing beyond the present life. And even those who are more sober-minded, and act under a serious sense and conviction of these truths, who are, I yet hope, no small party among us, seem often afraid of avowing this openly; keep their good sentiments to themselves and their closets, and shew little warmth or zeal in the cause of religion, lest they should be thought to offend against the fashion and forms of the world. The advocate for virtue will talk freely of the interests of society, of honour and honesty, and the public good; but as to his interest in another life, or his regard for the favour of God, he keeps them for the most part out of sight; and talks of them, if at all, with scruple and reserve. Strange, to be sure, and absurd, that men should be ashamed to own their hopes of immortality; or think the character

rafter of a Christian, which implies in it every thing that is amiable and benevolent, every thing that is truly great and good, a term of reproach, rather than of honour and esteem. But if this be the case, if this weakness of mind be so generally prevalent, it behoves us to be upon our guard where we are so much exposed to danger. We must be ever awake to the calls of reason and conscience, and suffer no rival power to usurp their rights, or to claim the dominion over us. We must habituate ourselves to pay an unreserved submission to their authority, neither courting the applause nor fearing the reproach of men. It is surely incumbent upon all to think for themselves, where they are themselves the parties; and especially to weigh well those hopes and fears which have for their object another world, and which propose to us an interest in eternity itself. We must open our faith to the evidence of things not seen; remembering that reality and existence depend not on the distance of time or place; that what is future will have its accomplishment, and will as certainly be one day present, as the present was once future; that truth will be ever the same, whether we attend to it or not; and eternity remain what it is, however we may banish it from our thoughts.

Let us then bear ever in mind, that this eternity is before us; that whatever our lot may be in it, time is now bringing it forward, and will soon consign us over to it for ever. How solicitous then should we be, with fear and trembling, to work out this great salvation, and to leave nothing undone by which we may attain eternal life?

Another reason of this thoughtless security and indifference to the objects we are speaking of, and which has, I am persuaded, a more general effect upon Christians than any of the former, is the present disinclination they are apt to feel to these researches into things that seem obscure and at a distance, and which may be contemplated at another time; while they are solicited by other cares and pleasures, which perpetually surround them. It is not the present business of the day. Some party of pleasure is to be joined, some dissipation invites to fill up the vacant hour; or perhaps it is irksome, as I said, to think about them at present, and we will do it at another

season. But how strange an account will this be to give to God, if you are to be judged hereafter, or to your own consciences now, that you could find no time to think on the great points for which the powers of reason and thought were given you, that you could not attend to the business of life, the very end for which you were born, and for which you live, because of the cares and pleasures which continually employed and amused you?

But what is there that can hinder us from employing our thoughts some minutes in every day on these interesting subjects? Your prayers and devotions, if you lift up your thoughts to God, and have your heart and attention engaged in them, will necessarily bring them every day before you. It is, however, the very business of every seventh day; the very reason on God's part, and the only means on yours, of hallowing this day. Can you then find any excuse for not turning your thoughts on this day to the subjects I am recommending to you? Can you find a nobler theme, a nobler field of contemplation, to employ those hours which the laws of God and your country have consecrated to this purpose?

I am indeed aware that many good men, I mean moderately good men, begin to relax in their opinions about the duties of this day. The time is advancing when we shall have fashion; and perhaps the example of moderately good men, pleaded in favour of such customs as have been usually thought irreligious, and a profanation of this holy day. Cards and innocent amusements, we shall be told, are as innocent on a day of rest as on any other; and without something to fill up the time, the sabbath—what a weariness is it? But granting these amusements to be never so innocent in themselves, you are, I am sure, sensible, in the light we are considering them, of the danger and evil of indulging in them; and will therefore, I hope, be prepared with firmness and zeal to oppose every attempt towards such innovations; as well as to lead others, by your example, to the proper uses and exercises of the day.

I shall not at present remark on the great waste of time on other days so frequently allowed to these diversions, nor inquire how many domestic duties, besides those of prudence and economy, are

are often sacrificed to them. But when we have convinced ourselves that we have indeed immortal spirits within us, we shall perhaps think it right to consider, whether so large a proportion of this time, as is sometimes allotted to them, may not be more worthily employed in improving the mind in useful knowledge, or habits of industry and virtue, than in amusements by which nothing can possibly be gained to the mind, and by some of which much may be lost; if unhappily it be susceptible of the passions of avarice, fretfulness, or envy, which, by being frequently excited, will not fail to become habitual.

I would not be thought to judge with too much severity of these subjects, or to make religion appear an enemy, which it surely is not, to the innocent and rational pleasures of life. But however, let those, who can spare so much time from the duties of life to these avocations, be sure to employ the rest of it in the best manner; and especially to improve that time which is dedicated to pious uses, to the purposes for which it was designed. And for those, who cannot by reading or the strength of their own minds, carry their thoughts and inquiries far into these subjects, let them attend with the more care and diligence, the public instruction of the church; let them treasure up in their minds, and frequently reflect on the doctrines they learn there; not as matters of speculation and opinion only, but as rules of life and practice, to compare their past, and form their future conduct by. So will the lessons they hear there, if received with an honest and good heart, however mixed with weakness and much infirmity on the part of the teacher, be sufficient and able to make them wise unto salvation. Lastly, to all let me apply myself, and what has been said, in the words of Moses to the children of Israel: *Set your hearts unto all the words which I testify among you this day: for it is not a vain thing for you, because it is your life. The issues of eternity depend upon it: the great alternative of everlasting life, or death eternal.*

SERMON CLVIII.

By BEILBY PORTEUS, D.D.

Lord Bishop of London.

The Character of our Lord, as delineated in the Gospel, one convincing Proof that he was the Son of God.

MATT. xxvii. 54.

Truly this was the Son of God.

WE have here a testimony to the divine character of our blessed Lord, which must be considered as in the highest degree impartial and incorrupt. It is the testimony not of friends, but of enemies; not of those who were prepossessed in favour of Christ and his religion, but of those who, by habit and education, were prejudiced, and strongly prejudiced, against them. It is, in short, the voice of nature and of truth; the honest, unpremeditated confession of the heathen centurion, and the soldiers under him, whom the Roman governor had appointed as a guard over the crucifixion of our Lord. So forcibly struck were these persons with the behaviour of Jesus, and the astonishing circumstances attending his death, that they broke out involuntarily into the exclamation of the text, *Truly this was the Son of God.*

Different opinions, it is well known, have been entertained by learned men concerning the precise sense in which the centurion understood Christ to be *the Son of God*. But, without entering here into any critical niceties, (which do not in the least affect the main object of this discourse,) I shall only observe in general, that, even after making every abatement, which either grammatical accuracy, or parallel passages, may seem to require, the very lowest meaning we can affix to the text, in any degree consistent with the natural force of the language, and the magnitude of the occasion, is this: that the centurion, comparing together every thing he had seen, and rising in his expressions of admiration, as our Lord's increasing magnanimity grew more and more upon his observation, concluded him to be, not only a person of most extraordinary virtue, and most transcendent righteousness, but of a nature more than human, and bearing evident marks of a divine original.

That

That his conclusion went at least so far as this, will appear highly probable from considering the two distinct grounds on which it was founded.

The first was the attention with which the centurion appears to have marked the whole behaviour of our Lord during the dreadful scene he passed through, from the beginning to the end of his sufferings upon the cross. He placed himself, as St. Mark informs us, *over against* Jesus. From that station he kept his eye constantly fixed upon him, and observed, with anxious care, every thing he said or did. And when he saw the meekness, the patience, the resignation, the firmness, with which our Lord endured the most excruciating torments; when he heard him at one time praying fervently for his murderers; at another disposing, with dignity and authority, of a place in Paradise to one of his fellow-sufferers; and, at length, with that confidence which nothing but conscious virtue, and conscious divinity, could, at such a time, inspire, recommending his spirit into the hands of his heavenly Father; from these circumstances, what other inference could the centurion draw, than that Jesus was not merely a righteous but a heavenly-born person?

But there was another, and that a still more powerful proof of our Lord's celestial origin, which offered itself to the centurion's notice; I mean the astonishing events that took place when Jesus expired; the agitation into which all nature seemed to be thrown, the darkness, the earthquake, the rending of rocks, the opening of graves; miracles which the centurion conceived, and justly conceived, were not likely to be wrought on the death of a mere mortal.

And, indeed, it must be acknowledged, that the miracles recorded, and the prophecies accomplished in the history of Christ, are the two great pillars on which our faith in him must principally rest. But as an enquiry into this sort of proof would lead us into an argument much too extensive and too complex for our present purpose, I shall content myself with enlarging a little on that other kind of evidence above-mentioned, the character and conduct of our divine Master. Of this the centurion saw nothing more, perhaps, than the closing scene. And if this operated so forcibly, as it seems to have done, on his mind, how

powerfully must ours be affected by taking into the account the virtues which Jesus displayed through life, as well as those he manifested at his death? We may reasonably expect, that it will at once confirm the faith of those who believe, and produce conviction on those who do not.

Were we only to say of our Saviour what even Pilate said of him, *that we can find no fault in him*, that the whole temper of his soul, and the whole tenor of his life, were absolutely blameless throughout; that, from the first moment of his birth to his last agony on the cross, he never once fell into the smallest error of conduct, never once spake unadvisedly with his lips; were we, I say, to confine ourselves solely to this negative kind of excellence, it is more than can be said of any other person that ever yet came into the world. But great and uncommon as even this sort of perfection is, it forms but a very small part of that which belonged to Jesus. He was not only exempt from every the slightest failing, but he possessed and practised every imaginable virtue that was consistent with his situation; and that too in the highest degree of excellence to which virtue is capable of being exalted. That idea of complete goodness which the ancient philosophers took so much fruitless pains to describe, and which they justly thought would so strongly attract the affections of men if it could be made visible, was, in the person of the holy Jesus, and in him only since the world began, presented to the eyes of mankind. His ardent love for God, his zeal for the service, his resignation to the will, his unreserved obedience to the commands of his heavenly Father; the compassion, the kindness, the solicitude, the tenderness he showed for the whole human race, even for the worst of sinners and the bitterest of his enemies; the perfect command he had over his own passions; the consummate prudence with which he eluded all the snares that were laid for him; the wisdom, the justness, the delicacy of his replies; the purity and the gentleness of his manners; the sweetness yet dignity of his deportment; the mildness with which he reproved the mistakes, the prejudices, and the failings of his disciples; the temper he preserved under the severest provocations from his enemies; the patience, the composure, the meekness,

with which he endured the cruellest insults, and the grossest indignities; the fortitude he displayed under the most painful and ignominious death that human ingenuity could devise, or human malignity inflict; and that divinely charitable prayer which he put up for his murderers in the very midst of his agony; *Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do*; all these, and a multitude of other peculiar excellencies in his character, (which it is impossible here to enumerate,) concur to render him, beyond comparison, the greatest, the wisest, and the best, of men.

Considered more particularly as a public teacher, what an understanding must that have been, and whence enlightened, from which so sublime and perfect a system of piety and morals as that of the gospel, proceeded, excelling not only all the discoveries of men, and the most perfect systems of pagan morality, but all the revelations of God made before him.

But further still. How astonishing, and from what source inspired, must the mind of that man be, who could entertain so vast a thought in so low a condition, as that of instructing and reforming a whole world; a world divided between atheism and superstition, but universally abandoned to sin; of teaching the whole race of mankind to live soberly, righteously, and godly here, and leading them on to an eternity of happiness hereafter? How contemptible a figure do they, who affected to be the conquerors of the world, make, when compared with him who undertook to be the Saviour of it? Then, in the execution of this immense design, what condescension without meanness, what majesty without pride, what firmness without obstinacy, what zeal without bitterness or enthusiasm, what piety without superstition; how wonderful a combination of seemingly most opposite, if any could be opposite, virtues; how exact a temperature of every thing great, and venerable, and lovely, in his soul! And another very important and remarkable consideration is, that all these admirable qualities appeared perfectly easy and natural to him, and seemed not to require the least exertion of his mind to produce or to support them. And the case was the same in his discourses and his instructions. No emotion when he delivered the most sublime and affecting

doctrines, the most comfortable or most terrifying predictions. The prophets before him fainted and sunk under the communications which they received from above. But truths that overwhelmed the servants of God, were familiar to his Son. Composed on the greatest occasions, respectable even on the least, he was at all times the same; and the uniform dignity and propriety of his behaviour throughout, evidently flowed from the inbred grandeur and rectitude of his mind. Tried he was every way (and that in so public a life perpetually) by wicked men, by the wicked one, by friends as well as by enemies; but far from being overcome, never once disconcerted, never once embarrassed, but calmly superior to every artifice, to every temptation, to every difficulty.

Well then, may we ask, even after this very short and very imperfect sketch of our Saviour's character, *Whence has this man these things, and what wisdom is this, that is given unto him?* He had evidently none of the usual means or opportunities of cultivating his understanding, or improving his heart. He was born in a low and indigent condition, without education, without learning, without any models to form himself upon, either in his own time and his own country, or in any records of former ages that were at all likely to fall into his hands. Yet, notwithstanding this, he manifested and supported invariably through life, such wisdom and such virtue as were never before found united, and, we may venture to say, never will be again united in any human being. The consequence then is unavoidable, and one of these two things must be true:—Either the character of our Lord, as drawn in the gospels, must be absolutely ideal and fictitious, existing nowhere but in the imagination of those who drew it; or else the person to whom really it belonged must be endowed with powers more than human: for never did mere mortal man either speak or act as Jesus did.

If we take the former part of the alternative and affirm, that the portrait of our Saviour, as drawn in the gospels, is an ideal one; where, in the first place, shall we find the man that could draw it? where shall we find the man who, by the mere force of imagination, could invent a character at once so absolutely perfect, and so truly original? The circumstances of his uniting the divine and human nature

ture, in one person, and of his being at one and the same time, the Messiah of the Jews, and the Instructor, the Redeemer, the Mediator, and the Judge of mankind, are so very peculiar, and so perfectly new; and yet all these several parts are so well supported, and preserved so distinct, and every thing our Saviour said or did is so admirably accommodated to each, that to form such a character as this, without any original to copy it from, exceeds the utmost stretch of human invention. Even the best of the Greek and Roman writers never produced any thing to be compared with it, either in point of originality or of excellence, though they frequently exerted themselves to the utmost in forming beautiful portraits of wisdom, greatness, and goodness of mind, sometimes in the way of compliment, sometimes of instruction. But however some extraordinary genius, in the polite and learned nations of the world, might have succeeded in such an attempt, let it be remembered that the historians of Jesus were Jews, natives of a remote and, in general, unlettered corner of the world. How came they by such extraordinary powers of invention? They have never shewn such powers in any other instance. Not even the sublimest of their own sacred books equal, in this respect, the history of the gospel; much less their apocryphal writings, much less Philo and Josephus, though instructed in pagan literature and philosophy. And as to the succeeding rabbies, they have not given the history of a single person that is not over-run with wildness and absurdity. Or if we think it possible that one Jew at least might be found, who, with the help of extraordinary talents, and a better education than any of the rest ever had, might do so much more than any of the rest ever did, what colour can there be for applying this to the evangelists, to those who have been so often and so opprobriously called the publicans, the tent-makers, and the fishermen of Galilee? They had never studied at Athens or at Rome. They had no superior talents, no learning, no education, no skill in designing or colouring ideal characters. It is not most assuredly, it is not men such as these that invent.

Nay, further still, had they been ever so capable of forming such a character as that of our Saviour, what reason in the

world is there to imagine that they would have ascribed it to their Messiah. They expected him to be of a spirit and a behaviour widely different from that of the meek, and humble, and passive Jesus. They expected an enterprising and prosperous warrior, avenging the injurious sufferings of his countrymen, trampling the nations under his feet, and establishing the Jewish empire, and with it the Jewish law, throughout the world. Possessed as they were with these notions, instead of drawing for their promised Deliverer such a portrait as the gospel presents to us, had they seen it ready drawn, and been asked whose it was, he would have been the last person upon earth for whom they would have conceived it intended.

Besides, what conceivable inducement could the sacred historians have to impose an imaginary personage upon the world? and why, above all, should they persevere in this imposition, when they saw and felt that hatred, and persecution, and death, were the certain consequences of their maintaining the reality of a character, which they knew all the while to be a mere phantom of their own creation, and could have saved themselves by confessing it? But even if it were possible that human creatures might, contrary to all honesty, and all interest, be thus unaccountably bent on deceiving, we have as full evidence as can be, that the evangelists were not so. There is manifestly an air of simplicity and godly sincerity, of plain unornamented truth in every thing they relate; nothing wrought up with art, nothing studiously placed in the fairest light to attract the eye, no solicitude to dwell even on the most illustrious parts of our Saviour's character; but, on the contrary, so dry and cold a manner of telling the most striking facts, and most affecting truths, as furnishes ground to apprehend that they themselves did not always distinctly perceive the divine wisdom and excellence of many things said and done by Jesus, and recorded in their books. At least, they have by no means brought them forward into view as they well deserved, and as men who wrote with a design would most certainly have done. This very circumstance, added to the whole turn and tenor of their writings, most clearly prove, that they followed with religious care, and

delivered with scrupulous fidelity, truth and fact, as it appeared to them, and nothing else.

It is evident, therefore, upon the whole, that our blessed Lord was in reality the very person that he is represented to be in the gospel. And as he is represented to have possessed a degree of perfection, both intellectual and moral, far beyond what human nature is capable of arriving at, and that too, without any of the common means of acquiring such perfection, the conclusion can be no other than this, that both he and his religion came from God.

But it may still perhaps be said, that there is no necessity for supposing any thing supernatural in the case. He was only one of those wonderful and extraordinary characters that sometimes appear even in the very lowest stations; and by the force of great natural talents, a native dignity of mind, and a constitutional goodness of disposition, break out from the obscurity of their situation, and rise superior to all the rest of mankind.

But besides what has been already insisted on, that no such character as that of Christ is to be found in any nation of the world, in any period of time, or any situation of life, it must be remembered, that our Lord himself laid claim to something more than the character of a great and a good man. He laid claim to a divine original. He affirmed, that he was the Son of God, and that he and his Father were one. If therefore, this was not the case, he must have been either an enthusiast or an impostor. In other words, he must have been a very weak, or a very wicked man. But either of these suppositions is utterly irreconcilable with the description that has just been given of him, with every idea of wisdom and of goodness, which yet he has been proved, and is allowed to have possessed in their utmost extent. Whoever then acknowledges him to be a great, a wise, and a perfectly good man, must also, on his own principles, allow him that divinity which he claimed.

Here, then, is a proof of the divine authority of our Lawgiver, and our religion, which every one may comprehend, and which it will not be easy for any one to withstand. Some allege that they want leisure, and others that they want learning or ability, to investigate, with

sufficient care and accuracy, the prophetic, the miraculous, and the historical evidences of our faith. This, indeed, is commonly nothing more than mere pretence. But even this pretence is taken away by the argument here offered to their consideration. It is involved in no difficulty, and requires no laborious or critical examination, no uncommon degree of sagacity or ability to decide upon. Nothing more is requisite than to lay open the Bible and to contemplate the character of our Lord, as it is there drawn with the most perfect fairness and honesty by the evangelists. Whoever can judge of any thing, can judge of this; and we know by experience that it is calculated to carry conviction even into the most unwilling minds. We have seen, that even a pagan centurion, when he beheld Jesus expiring on the cross, could not forbear crying out, (and many others with him,) *Truly, this was the Son of God.* And it is very remarkable, that the contemplation of the very same scene, as described in the gospel history, extorted a similar, but still stronger confession of Christ's divine nature, from one of the most eloquent of modern sceptics, who has never been accused of too much credulity, and who, though he could bring himself to resist the force even of miracles and of prophecies, yet was overwhelmed with the evidence arising from the character, the conduct, and the sufferings of Christ. "Where," says he, "is the man, where is the philosopher, who can act, suffer, and die, without weakness, and without ostentation? When Plato describes his imaginary just man, covered with all the opprobrium of guilt, yet at the same time meriting the sublimest rewards of virtue, he paints precisely every feature in the character of Jesus Christ. The resemblance is so striking, that all the fathers have observed it, and it is impossible to be deceived in it. What prejudice, what blindness, must possess the mind of that man who dares to compare the son of Sophroniscus to the son of Mary? What a distance is there between the one and the other? The death of Socrates, philosophizing calmly with his friends, is the most gentle that can be wished; that of Jesus expiring in torments, insulted, derided, and reviled by all the people, the most horrible that can be imagined. So-
crates

"crates taking the poisoned cup, blesses
 "the man who presents it to him; and
 "who, in the very act of presenting it,
 "melts into tears. Jesus, in the midst of
 "the most agonizing tortures, prays for
 "his enraged executioners. Yes, if the
 "life and death of Socrates are those of
 "a sage, the life and death of Jesus are
 "those of a God."

It is not, then, the prejudice (as it has been called) of a Christian education, it is not the mere dotage of superstition, or the mere enthusiasm of pious affection and gratitude towards our Redeemer, which make us discover in his character plain and evident marks of the Son of God. They have been discovered and acknowledged by men who were troubled with no such religious infirmities; by one man who was a professed pagan, and by another man who, without professing it, and perhaps without knowing it, was in fact little better than a pagan. On the strength of these testimonies, then, added to the proofs which have been here adduced, we may safely assume it as a principle, *that Jesus is the Son of God.* The necessary consequence is, that every thing he taught comes to us with the weight and sanction of divine authority, and demands from every sincere disciple of Christ implicit belief, and implicit obedience. We must not, after this, pretend (as is now too much the prevailing mode) to select just what we happen to like in the gospel, and lay aside all the rest; to admit, for instance, the moral and preceptive part, and reject all those sublime doctrines which are peculiar to the gospel, and which form the wall of partition between Christianity and what is called natural religion. This is assuming a liberty, and creating a distinction, which no believer in the divine authority of our Lord, can on any ground justify. Christ delivered all his doctrines in the name of God. He required that all of them, without exception, should be received. He has given no man a licence to adopt just as much, or as little of them as he thinks fit. He has authorized no one human being to add thereto, or diminish therefrom.

Let us, then, never presume thus to new-model the gospel, according to our own particular humour or caprice, but be content to take it as God has thought fit to leave it. Let us admit, as it is our bounden duty, on the sole ground of his

authority, those mysterious truths which are far beyond the reach of any finite understanding, but which it was natural and reasonable to expect, in a revelation pertaining to that incomprehensible Being, *the High and Lofty One that inhabiteth eternity.* (H. lvii. 15.) *Let us not exercise ourselves in great matters which are too high for us, but refrain our souls and keep them low.* (Ps. cxxxi. 1.) Laying aside all the superfluity and all the pride of human wisdom, *let us bold fast the profession of our faith,* without wavering, without refining, without philosophizing. Let us put ourselves, without delay and without reserve, into the hands of our heavenly Guide, and submit our judgments, with boundless confidence, to his direction, who is *the way, the truth, and the life.* (John, xiv. 6.) Since we know in whom we believe; since it has been this day proved by one kind of argument, and might be proved by a thousand others, that he is the Son of God; let us never forget that this gives him a right, a divine right, to the obedience of our understandings, as well as to the obedience of our wills. Let us, therefore, resolutely beat down every bold imagination, *every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God; bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ; and receiving with meekness the ingrafted word, that is able to save our souls.* (James, i. 21.)

SERMON CLIX.

The many various Opportunities of doing good.

PROVERBS, iii. 27.

Withhold not good from them to whom it is due, when it is in the power of thine hand to do it.

WHEN we reflect on that general turn to acts of charity and humanity which is so observable in this country, it may perhaps appear perfectly needless to recommend to our hearers the injunction contained in the text. If they are so well-disposed, as it should seem they are, to do good, to what purpose are they exhorted not to withhold it from them to whom it is due? And, indeed, if there was no other way of doing good but that of relieving the indigent, there would not often, it must be owned, be much occasion to urge the practice of this duty. But we must not flatter ourselves, that when we have distributed to the necessitous

all the wealth we can spare, we have done every thing that the love of our neighbour requires at our hands. At the best, we have only performed one part, and that a small part, of the great, the *royal law*, (as it is called, James, ii. 8.) of Christian charity, which involves a great variety of most important and useful acts of kindness to our fellow-creatures.—Several of these, though extremely easy and obvious, are for that very reason, perhaps, apt to be overlooked. Some of them, therefore, I shall beg leave at present to suggest to your thoughts, from whence the two following good consequences, among others, may arise. The great and the wealthy will see, that to be truly benevolent, something more is necessary than liberality to the poor. And they who are in a humbler station of life, and who on that account are apt to lament their inability to do good, will find, that there are many roads to beneficence still open to them; and that scarce any one, however low or indigent, can want opportunities of doing good, if he will but honestly make use of them.

I. First, then, there is a negative kind of benevolence, which it is most certainly in every man's power to exercise if he pleases; and that is, abstinence from mischief. As the first step towards wisdom is to avoid error, and towards happiness to feel no pain, so the first advance towards benevolence is to do no harm. It may seem, perhaps, a great impropriety of expression to dignify this with the name of benevolence; but if benevolence consists, as it certainly does, in contributing to the comfort and happiness of our fellow-creatures, there is not any one act of humanity that will operate so effectually and extensively to this end, as refraining from every thing that can offend, distress, or injure others. By far the greatest part of the misery we see in the world, arises not so much from omitting acts of kindness, as from committing acts of unkindness and cruelty; and were all these to cease at once, the effect on the general happiness of mankind would be somewhat similar to that inexpressible comfort we experience in ourselves on the removal of some violent pain. Think only what infinite mischief arises from perverseness, ill-nature, and pride; from detraction, falsehood, deceit, and treachery; from fraud and oppres-

sion; from envy, hatred, anger, lust, ambition, revenge, and the whole infernal family of malevolent passions. Annihilate all the evils that arise from these sources, and this world would be a paradise; every other kind of charity would be almost unnecessary; for it is the chief business of human compassion, to heal those wounds which human malignity is constantly inflicting. How much, then, is it to be lamented, that this most important branch of charity is not more attended to than it seems to be! There is no one character in the world, which men are in general so ambitious of having ascribed to them, as that of good-nature and benevolence. With some (especially those that reject Christianity, but profess themselves friends to virtue) this is deemed not merely the first of human duties, but the only one worth their notice; the one thing needful, the sum and substance of all morality and religion. One should naturally suppose, therefore, that this virtue at least, this favourite and fashionable virtue, would be perfectly well understood and practised, and every the minutest branch of it most assiduously cultivated and improved. But how far this is from being the case, is but too apparent. The common pretence to it is seldom any thing more than a little constitutional easiness of temper, a sociability of disposition, and a thoughtless, indiscriminate, perhaps even pernicious liberality. On these grounds do great numbers fancy themselves the kindest, the gentlest, the most benevolent of human beings. And yet at the same time, these men of benevolence will not scruple, perhaps, where their own interest is concerned, to oppress and harass their inferiors without the least feelings of compassion or remorse, to invade their clearest rights, disregard their most equitable claims, distress them with expensive and tedious litigations, and crush them with the weight of their wealth and power. If envy or ambition, if prejudice or party, if spleen or resentment, inflame their minds, they will say sometimes the bitterest and the cruellest things of those whom they happen to dislike; will calumniate the fairest and most unblemished characters; will misrepresent the best intentioned actions and designs; and give way to such a vehemence of temper and conduct, as is utterly inconsistent with all

true

true benevolence. If softer passions take possession of them, these they will often indulge to the very utmost; let what will be the consequence, let who will be the sufferer. The dignity of virtuous innocence, the peace and comfort of families, the ties of friendship, the laws of hospitality, the sanctity of plighted vows, the happiness of those whom they are bound, by the most solemn engagements, to cherish and to protect, all these, and a thousand other no less sacred obligations, are trifles to them, are brushed away like the morning dew, when they stand in the way of their desires; and multitudes must be made wretched for ever, that they may be triumphant for one moment. And yet, if the slightest injury or insult be offered to themselves, they take fire in an instant; they pursue the offender with inextinguishable fury and rancour, and, whilst they are violating every hour the maxims of true honour, will sacrifice to notions of false honour the life of the dearest friend they have in the world.— Let not these, let not any such as these, ever pretend to talk of humanity or benevolence. They are ignorant of its first principles, and have the very rudiments of true Christian charity yet to learn. Though to some persons, and on some occasions, they may, perhaps, be generous and kind; yet if they are dissolute, oppressive, implacable, vindictive, the misery they occasion by these vices, will infinitely outweigh all the good they do in other instances, and justly denominate them hard-hearted and inhuman.

II. The very first duty, then, of the benevolent man, is to do harm to no one. Then let him go on to do good to as many as he can. And he may do good to more persons, and in more cases, than he is perhaps aware of. What numberless opportunities, for instance, are there of making others happy in the daily commerce of life, (especially in its nearest and tenderest connections,) by an easy, affable, condescending, gentle, encouraging behaviour and conversation. We may say and do the most trivial things, in such a manner as to give almost as much pleasure to those with whom we constantly live and converse, as we could do by the most substantial acts of kindness. And let not this be thought unworthy the attention of a Christian assembly. Scripture itself commands us

to be courteous, (1 Pet. iii. 8.) and the manners of our blessed Lord were not only mild and gentle, but graceful and captivating. This was the natural result of his unbounded benevolence, which is indeed the best, the only sure and solid foundation of true urbanity. Without real undissembled good-will to others, either from principle or constitution, there can be no such thing as a constant desire to please; and without such a desire always present to our minds, it is impossible we should please. Whoever, therefore, wishes to render himself universally beloved and admired, must not merely seem benevolent; he must be really so. When once he is, every thing else will generally follow of course, without difficulty, without effort, without the least occasion for art, disguise, or management. When all is goodness within, all must be gracious and engaging without. When there is a fountain of genuine kindness in the soul, it will naturally and spontaneously diffuse itself to every the minutest part of our behaviour.

III. They who have had much experience in the world, may be of infinite use to those who have had but little, by giving them wise, and seasonable, and salutary advice; by rectifying their crude mistaken notions of men and things; by instructing them in the real value of the blessings and the evils both of this life and the next; by pointing out to them the road they are to take, the objects they are to pursue; by guarding them against those hasty friendships and ruinous connections, which they are but too apt to form; by teaching them, in fine, to distinguish properly between trivial, showy, superficial accomplishments, and those solid, substantial attainments, both intellectual, moral, and religious, which ought to engage the chief attention of a rational and immortal being. This world is a wide and turbulent ocean, full of rocks and shoals; and there cannot be a kinder or more useful thing, than to furnish those who are ready to launch out upon it with a proper chart and compass to direct their course. There are few persons, who have not, in some part of their lives, abundant opportunities of exercising their benevolence and good-nature, in this way, towards the thoughtless and inexperienced. And they must have

have little feeling, indeed, who can see a poor giddy wretch running headlong down a precipice, without stretching out a friendly hand to snatch him from destruction.

IV. But if we are afraid of being thought meddling and officious, and of provoking enmity where friendship only was meant, there is another method of instructing and benefiting others, which cannot possibly give offence; and that is—a good example. A regular, virtuous, religious life, besides all the good it does in other respects, is a constant lesson of morality to all around us. It is a silent insinuating kind of advice, which steals unobserved into the mind; and its operations, though imperceptible, are commonly most effectual. Living under the influence of a bright example, is to the soul, what breathing a pure and wholesome air is to the body. We find ourselves mended, and improved, and invigorated by both, without any sensible impression made upon us, without perceiving how the happy change is brought about. When people offer us advice in form, it seems to argue a kind of superiority which sometimes piques and offends us. We are apt to set ourselves, out of mere pride, to fence and fight against it, and can scarce ever be ingenuous enough to own ourselves in the wrong when any one presumes to tell us that we are so: but we cannot possibly be angry at a man for taking care of his own conduct; for going on in the right road himself, and leaving us to follow him or not, as we think fit. When virtue is thus made visible in human form, its charms are too powerful to be resisted. Instead of applying to the understanding, it makes its way directly to the heart; and when that is once gained over, all difficulty is at an end. Here, then, is a way of doing good, which is equally in the power of the greatest man and the meanest. He has nothing to do, but to go quietly on in the path of duty, and he will be followed by multitudes, on whom neither argument nor persuasion would ever make the slightest impression.

But though every one may thus make his light shine most usefully before men, yet the higher this light is placed, the wider will be its sphere, and the more extensive its influence. They, therefore,

who by their birth, their station, their power, their wealth, their profession, their abilities, are set, as it were, upon an eminence, and held up to the observation of the world, are more especially bound to take heed to their ways; since the good or the harm they may do by their conduct is inconceivable. It is very well known, that the lower orders of men almost constantly take the cast and colour of their lives from those above them. The manners of the people, therefore, are to a great degree in the hands of their superiors, and may be moulded by them into whatever form they please. What a noble opportunity of doing good does this afford to those superiors! An opportunity which, to every man of benevolence, of public spirit, nay, even of any honest ambition, must be such a temptation to right conduct, as one would think it impossible for him to withstand. What a fair and obvious path to reputation and applause is here marked out to the upper part of the world! How easy is it for them to merit, and to obtain, a place among the most distinguished friends and benefactors of mankind, merely by living as they ought; by being as eminently good as they are eminently great. There are, it must be confessed, numbers who are really so; and were those numbers to increase in the proportion they might and ought, we should soon see the infinite utility of such examples. It is an experiment that well deserves to be tried in its utmost extent, and the reward would amply repay the labour: for surely there is no gratification that wealth or power can bestow, equal to the feelings which they must have, who see multitudes of their fellow-creatures growing every day better and happier under their hands. It can be exceeded only by the unspeakable joy they will experience hereafter, when they perceive themselves surrounded in the realms of light, by those who have been brought there principally by their means; whose grateful transports will overwhelm them with delight, and for whose virtues they will be rewarded, as well as for their own.

V. Another very easy and unexpensive method of being serviceable to others is, by vindicating the characters of those that have been unjustly defamed and traduced. If the injured persons are stran-

gers to us, it is generous and noble to stand up in their defence. If they are our friends, we are bound by the most sacred ties to repel the insults offered to their good name. If they are set in authority over us, it is our duty to rescue them from the obloquy which we know they do not merit. In all these respects we have, it must be owned at present, an ample field for our benevolence to work in. With opportunities of doing good in this way, we are, indeed, most liberally furnished by the licence and malevolence of the age. For surely it is doing it no injustice to say, that one of its most distinguishing features is an intemperance in calumny, an indiscriminate wantonness of defamation, of which no other country, no other period even in this country, furnishes any example. It becomes, then, every friend to humanity, or even to common justice, to set himself with the utmost earnestness against this most unchristian fury of detraction. He can hardly do a greater kindness to individuals, or a more substantial service to the public, than by discouraging and repressing to the utmost every groundless slander, every unmerited reproach, let who will be the object, whether in the highest employments or the most private stations of life.

VI. But though in these and many other instances that might be mentioned, we may do most essential service to our fellow-creatures, yet they who have the strongest claim on our benevolence are undoubtedly the afflicted and distressed. To these, when pecuniary relief is all they want, it should certainly be administered in proportion to their necessities, to our circumstances, and the right they have to expect assistance from us. But it frequently happens, that the kindness they stand in need of is of a very different nature. Sometimes they require nothing more than a little support and countenance against some petty tyrant, that *deviseth mischief continually*. (Prov. vi. 14.) Sometimes they have undeservedly lost the affections of their best friend, whom they wish to regain. Sometimes they seek in vain admission to those who can alone effectually assist them. Sometimes a load of grief lies heavy on their minds, which calls for some compassionate hand to lighten or remove it, by consolation, by advice, by encouragement, by sympathy

and condolence, by every tender care, every soothing expression that humanity can dictate. In all these cases, and a multitude of others that might be mentioned, true benevolence will accommodate itself to the various distresses that fall in its way; will, with a versatility truly admirable, *become all things to all men*, and assume as many different shapes as there are modes of misery in the world. It will compose the differences of friends; it will arrest the violence of enemies; it will bring back the ungrateful child to a sense of his duty, the offended parent to the feelings of affection; *it will visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction; it will rejoice with them that rejoice, and weep with them that weep*; it will protect the helpless and the weak; will exert its influence, will exhaust its powers in redressing their injuries, and vindicating their rights; it will facilitate their access to the seats of justice; it will knock for them at the doors of the great; it will raise them up friends, where they could never have thought of looking for them; it will be as Aaron was to Moses, *a mouth to them* (Ex. iv. 16.); it will speak those wants which they are unable to represent, and plead for them with an eloquence which nothing can resist. The man of charity, in short, will not merely content himself with giving alms; he will give what people are often more unwilling to give, his attention, his thoughts, his care, his friendship, his protection. These are so many instruments of beneficence that God puts into our hands for the benefit of others. These were intended to supply the place of wealth; and will, in many cases, relieve distresses which wealth cannot reach.

To enter into a minute detail of all the various ways in which we may benefit mankind would be endless, and, indeed, in a great measure needless. For whoever is possessed with a sincere desire to do good, will have no occasion for a monitor to suggest to him when and where he shall exert it. He will be no less quick in discerning, than eager in embracing, every opportunity of exercising his benevolence. I shall therefore content myself with mentioning, in conclusion, only one more way of manifesting our good-will to mankind; which is in a very high degree important and beneficial; which lies as much within the reach of

of the lowest as the highest; and which yet both high and low are, I fear, but too apt to neglect, I mean, recommending our brethren to God in prayer.

Let not the philosopher smile at this! it is not to him I speak. He, I know, is infinitely above the meanness of paying any homage to the great Creator and Governor of the world. He disdains to pray even for his own welfare; how, then, should he ever think of imploring blessings upon others? how can he be expected to love his neighbour better than himself? He laughs at the idea of a particular providence, which regulates the minutest movements both of the natural and the moral world, and consequently looks on prayer as the idlest and most useless employment in which a human creature can be engaged. Let us leave him, then, to the enjoyment of that comfortable state of which he has made choice; turned adrift (as he must suppose himself) into a wide world, and abandoned to the caprice of chance and fortune, without protector, guide, or comforter; without any Almighty Friend to apply to for himself, or those he holds most dear, when exposed to dangers, or involved in calamities, where all human help is vain: here, I say, let us leave him; and let us devoutly thank God that we are not philosophers. Let us thank God that our belief of this most important doctrine of a particular providence is founded, not on the cobweb subtleties of human science, but on that solid immoveable rock the gospel of Christ.

The scripture informs us, that he who first created the world still continues to preserve it; that he is *about our path and about our bed, and spieth out all our ways* (Psalm cxxxix. ii.); that, *without his knowledge not a sparrow falls to the ground, and that the very hairs of our head are all numbered.* (Matt. x. 29, 30.) To this gracious and Almighty Being we are commanded to pray, and that not only for ourselves but for others also. *Pray one for another,* says St. James. *Let supplication, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men.* (1 Tim. ii. 1.) *Seek the peace of the city where you live, and pray unto the Lord for it.* (Jer. xxix. 7.) What a pleasing, what a spacious field of benevolence is here opened to the Christian, from which the unbeliever

(who yet, of all others, boasts the most of his benevolence) absolutely shuts himself out. We think it a strong mark of our regard to recommend those we love to some great and powerful friend, who is able to support and advance them in the world. But what earthly support or protection is to be compared to His, who has all the powers of nature, and all the events of futurity, at his command; who has the hearts of all men in his hand, and *turneth them whithersoever he will.* (Prov. xxi. 1.) What a privilege, what an honour, what an indulgence is it, that we are allowed to commit those we love to his care and guardianship; and that we can do it without raising up a rival in his affections! In the arms of his mercy there is room for all. He can embrace in them, at once, the whole race of mankind; and the more we intercede in our prayers for others, the surer are we of his kindness to ourselves. To him we seldom fail to have recourse in our own distress. There are cases in which we fly to him by a kind of instinctive impulse; in which, without the utmost violence, we cannot restrain ourselves from prayer. If then we have any real goodwill to our fellow-creatures, we shall implore the same mercies, and with the same earnestness, for them that we do for ourselves. If we have any love for our country, we shall not fail to give it a place in our devotions, and to pray most ardently for the prosperity and stability of our Jerusalem.

In what manner our prayers can be granted, or by what means God can avert calamity from those we recommend to his protection, without doing violence to what is called the ordinary course of nature, it is no concern of ours to inquire. If God has commanded us to pray for others, it is our business not to philosophize, but to obey. Let us give ourselves no trouble about the course of nature. It is perfectly safe in the hands of its divine Author. There may be no difficulties to Omnipotence, where we see nothing but impossibilities. Let us leave God to manage his own world, and perform his promises, as he certainly will, in his own way. All we have to do is, to make a faithful use of that valuable privilege of intercession, which he has graciously allowed us for the benefit of our fellow-creatures. The most indigent

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man may say to his neighbour, as St. Peter did to the cripple at the gate of the temple, *Silver and gold have I none; but such as I have, give I thee.* (Acts, iii. 6.) My wishes, my intercessions, my prayers you shall have. On earth, indeed, I can do nothing; but I will try to move heaven in your favour. This puts it into the power of the meanest member of society, if he is but religious and devout, to be as essentially useful, both to individuals and to the community, as those that fill the highest and most active stations of life. From the deepest solitude, and from the humblest cell, his prayers may reach the throne of God; may there touch one of those celestial springs that set the world in motion; may be among the reasons that induce the Almighty to give a new turn to the great wheels of the universe, and to rescue individuals, families, and empires, from destruction. Improbable, and even ridiculous, as this may seem to the profound reasoners of this world, the scriptures, both of the Old and New Testament, are full of the powerful prevalence and astonishing effects of prayer; and unless we absolutely renounce all faith in the gospel, and all confidence in the promises of Christ, we must admit the truth of this doctrine; we must acknowledge, that *the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man, either for himself, or for others, availeth much.* (James, v. 16.)

Let, then, every sincere Christian, unmoved by the cavils of the sophist, or the insults of the scorner, steadily and resolutely persevere in that most benevolent office of interceding for all mankind. Let him beseech the great Sovereign of the universe to enlighten the ignorant, to strengthen the weak, to confirm the doubtful, to convert the infidel, to reclaim the profligate, to soften the unmerciful, to restrain the violent and vindictive, to redress the injured and oppressed, to protect the innocent; to reconcile the interests and calm the passions of contending individuals and hostile nations; to avert from this hitherto favoured land those bitter evils with which other countries are now so cruelly desolated and overwhelmed; to direct the councils and prosper the just designs of those whom Providence has set over us; to unite the hearts of those they govern, as the heart of one man, in sentiments of Christian charity, and constitutional obedience. Let him implore, in fine, (as he naturally will,) the peculiar blessing of the Almighty on those he holds most dear; that, as our Liturgy very sublimely expresses it, "through his most mighty protection, both here and ever, they may be preserved both in body and soul; and that he being their ruler and guide, they may so pass through things temporal as finally to lose not the things that are eternal."

THE END.

